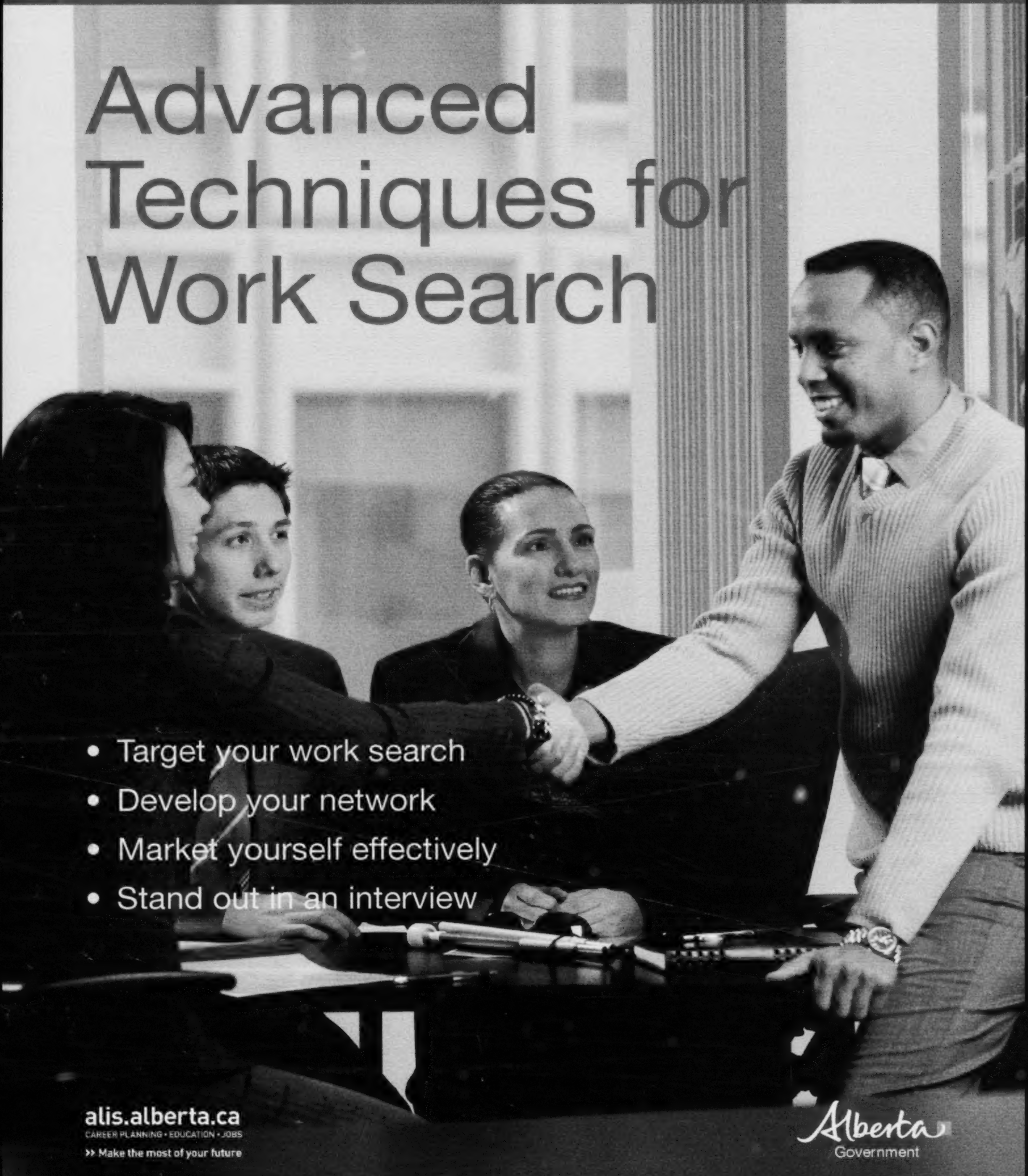

Advanced Techniques for Work Search

- Target your work search
- Develop your network
- Market yourself effectively
- Stand out in an interview

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Career Practitioners

This workbook was developed to help self-directed adults with experience in the workforce or with post-secondary education improve their work search strategies. It offers detailed information and exercises to help your clients

- identify their employability skills
- update their work search tools and skills (resumé, cover letters, portfolio, information gathering, interview skills, proposals, etc.)
- focus their work search
- find relevant labour market information
- access other work search resources

Clients looking for their first job, or those with limited work search experience, should check out *Work Search Basics*, available at **alis.alberta.ca/publications**.

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Information in this publication was accurate, to the best of our knowledge, at the time of printing. However, legislation, labour market information, websites and programs are subject to change, and we encourage you to confirm with additional sources of information when making career, education, employment and business decisions.

The Province of Alberta is working in partnership with the Government of Canada to provide employment support programs and services.

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How to use this publication

Advanced Techniques for Work Search takes you through the process involved in a typical work search by providing information, examples and exercises.

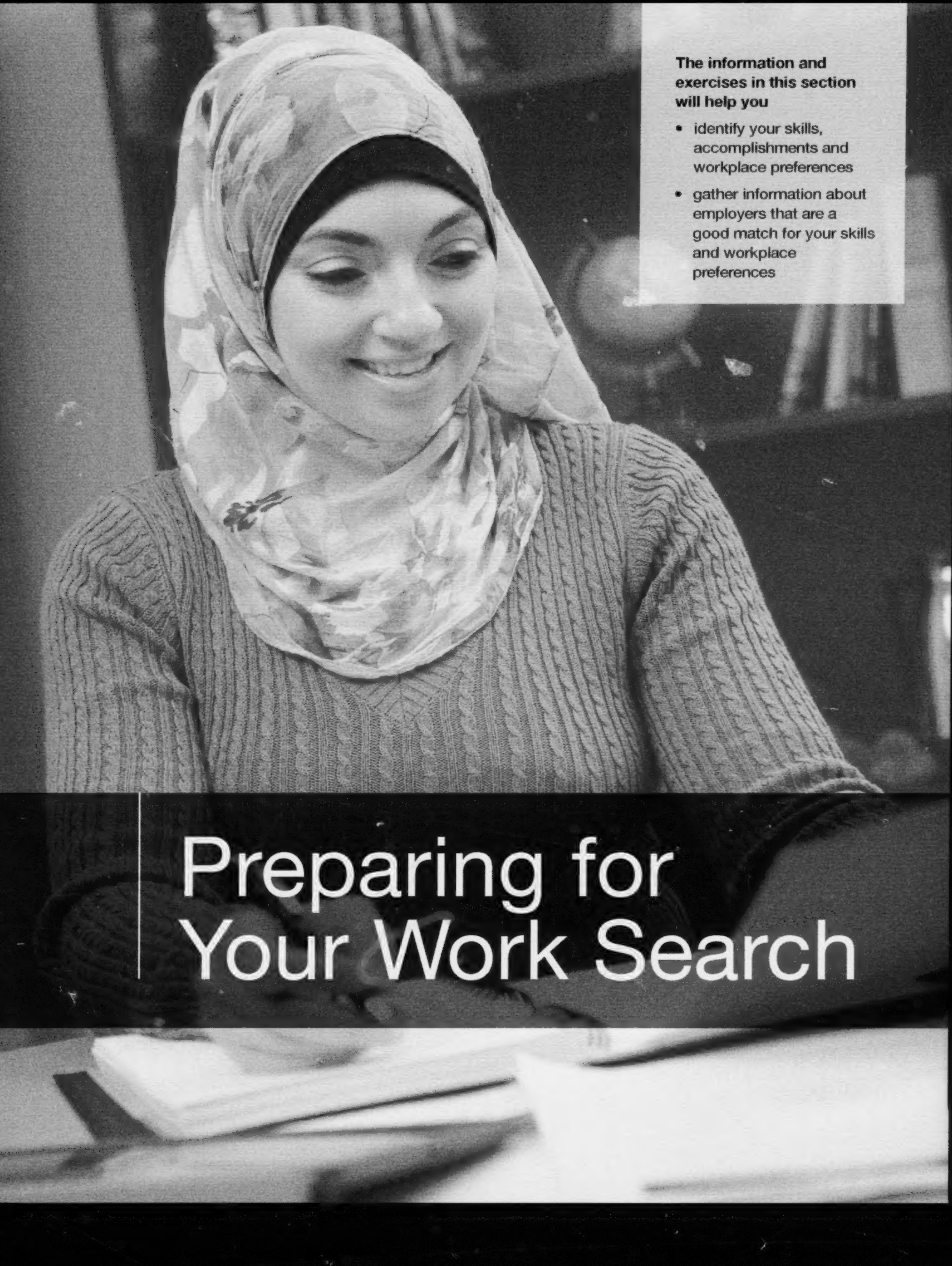
If you have some experience in the workplace or job market, then this publication is for you. If you are a new job seeker, you may want to start with *Work Search Basics*, available at **alis.alberta.ca/publications**.

The publication includes four primary parts:

- **Preparing for Your Work Search** will help you identify your relevant skills, accomplishments and work preferences and describe them effectively. This part also offers suggestions for identifying and researching potential employers.
- **Marketing Yourself** will help you present your product (yourself). This section provides guidelines for connecting with employers and creating resumés, cover letters and other tools that will show employers you have what they are looking for.
- **Preparing for the Interview** will show you how to present yourself effectively and how to create a positive impression when you meet face-to-face with prospective employers.
- **Strategies for Success** will offer suggestions for dealing with emotional, financial and other challenges related to searching for work.

You don't have to read the publication cover to cover in order to benefit from it. For example, if you already know what skills you have and the kind of work you want, you may decide to begin with **Marketing Yourself**. Or if you need help dealing with the emotional ups and downs of a typical job loss before starting your work search, you may want to start with **Strategies for Success**. You may want to spend more time on some areas and less on others. Use the detailed Table of Contents to find topics and exercises that apply to your specific work search needs.

Throughout the publication, you'll find references to useful websites and other resources with further information on a variety of topics.



The information and exercises in this section will help you

- identify your skills, accomplishments and workplace preferences
- gather information about employers that are a good match for your skills and workplace preferences

Preparing for Your Work Search

Identifying your skills

Start describing yourself by identifying your skills. Like most people, you probably have more skills than you give yourself credit for. Skills are often divided into two categories:

- *work-specific* or *technical skills*, such as knowing how to use a specific software program, repair a diesel engine or teach a math class
- *employability* or *transferable skills*, which are the more general skills and qualities you need to succeed in virtually every work situation

The following exercises will help you find the language to describe your skills to potential employers. Later, when you put together your resumé and cover letter or prepare for an interview, you can refer to these exercises for descriptive words and phrases.

When you're thinking about skills, don't limit yourself to those you use professionally. Include the skills you've acquired through volunteering, managing a household or taking part in recreational, sports or artistic activities. The average person uses 500 to 800 skills on a regular basis!

Which skills should you start with?

If you're looking for work that requires work-specific skills you already have, start your skills list with the following exercise, **Work-specific skills**. If you don't have much work experience or would like to change occupations, start with the exercise called **Employability skills** on page 7.

Exercise Work-specific skills

To identify your work-specific or technical skills, first write down the tasks that you perform in your work. (If you like, you can use the interactive worksheet available online at **alis.alberta.ca/workspecificskills**.)

Next, break down each task into the skills required. Be specific: the more detailed the list, the better.

For example, a technical writer might list the following tasks and skills:

TASK	SKILL
write online help text for a software program	interview subject matter experts test software translate technical information into clear, user-friendly terms organize topics logically use help-authoring software
create, follow and enforce an in-house style guide	research industry style standards consult subject matter experts on technical terms provide rationale for style decisions
create and deliver training	tailor information to the knowledge level of the audience (technical or layperson) write lecture material design hands-on training exercises deliver lectures in an engaging way scale course content to fit the time available

A human resources professional might list the following tasks and skills:

TASK	SKILL
recruitment and selection	write job ads for vacant positions evaluate applications fairly interview candidates conduct reference checks prepare employment contracts
compensation and benefits administration	gather industry-specific data on compensation levels design incentive programs co-ordinate benefits plans, including life, medical and disability insurance
training and development	identify ways to improve employees' skills and versatility develop and deliver internal orientation and training arrange external training

If you're having a hard time coming up with tasks and skills, check out the following resources:

- Alberta occupational profiles on the Alberta Learning Information Services (ALIS) website at **alis.alberta.ca/occinfo**
- job descriptions from your previous work
- resumé books
- job ads on the Internet or in the newspaper

When you've completed the exercise, highlight or circle the five skills that are most relevant to the work you are seeking. These are the skills you will focus on describing in more detail on your resumé and in interviews.

Exercise **Employability skills**

Employability skills are the critical transferable skills that are valuable across fields and in most workplaces. This exercise focuses on some of the categories of employability skills that employers identify as most important.

STEP 1 Check off all the skills you feel competent using. You don't have to be an expert at a skill to check it off. Include skills you haven't used for a while but could relearn quickly.

STEP 2 Highlight or circle the five checked skills you most enjoy using. These are probably the skills you're best at—the transferable skills you should emphasize when writing your resumé and talking to employers.

Communication

○ writing—using good grammar to write clear sentences and paragraphs; expressing yourself and explaining things in writing

○ public speaking—keeping the audience's attention while giving a presentation

○ questioning—deciding what questions to ask to obtain useful information or to help others gain insight

○ teaching—understanding group dynamics; instructing others

○ stating opinions—saying what you think, confidently and assertively

○ other ____________________
____
____
____

Analysis, problem solving and research

○ researching—locating information using appropriate technology and information systems (for example, computers, library classification systems, Internet search engines)

○ analyzing information—breaking it down to basic sections

○ estimating—judging the cost or size of things; predicting the outcome of a math problem before it is calculated; forecasting the cost of products and services

○ budgeting—planning how to spend money; deciding what to buy, how much to spend or how to get the work done most cost-effectively

○ evaluating situations and identifying problems

○ assessing problems from multiple viewpoints (for example, human, technical, scientific)

○ developing and evaluating solutions to make recommendations or decisions

○ selecting and using appropriate tools and technology

○ other ____________________
____
____
____

Flexibility, adaptability and management of multiple priorities

- ○ identifying and suggesting innovative ways to get work done
- ○ working on several tasks or projects at the same time
- ○ coping with uncertainty—making decisions when you're not sure what the outcome will be
- ○ adapting to changing requirements and information
- ○ other ____________________

____

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Leadership and management

- ○ coaching—providing one-to-one or small-group assistance to help others achieve a goal
- ○ providing feedback—accurately describing an individual's work, behaviour, appearance and so on in a helpful and considerate way
- ○ making decisions—choosing a course of action and accepting responsibility for the consequences
- ○ chairing meetings—presiding over a group of people who come together for a purpose; listening, speaking, encouraging discussion and following an agenda
- ○ other ____________________

____

____

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Planning and organization

- ○ determining priorities—deciding what's most important and doing that first
- ○ scheduling—predicting how much time tasks will take; setting time frames for activities; keeping track of projects, timetables, itineraries and so on
- ○ planning—developing projects or ideas through systematic preparation; deciding in which order and at what time events will occur
- ○ organizing—co-ordinating the people and resources necessary to put a plan into effect
- ○ maintaining records of inventory, budgets or other information
- ○ other ____________________

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Teamwork and interpersonal skills

○ negotiating—bargaining with others to solve a problem or reach an agreement

○ resolving conflicts—bringing disagreements to successful resolutions

○ listening—paying attention to what other people say in order to understand and appreciate different points of view and respond appropriately

○ giving credit where credit is due—recognizing your own and other people's good efforts

○ accepting authority—being able to work under supervision

○ clarifying the group's goals and objectives when necessary

○ accepting feedback without becoming angry or defensive

○ using tact—being discreet and diplomatic, particularly when dealing with sensitive issues

○ respecting differences—appreciating diversity; accepting the uniqueness of individuals

○ other ____________________
____
____
____

Reliability and responsibility

○ following through with time and financial plans and making adjustments when necessary

○ risking, when appropriate—assessing, weighing and managing physical, emotional and financial risk

○ accepting responsibility for your actions and the actions of your group

○ being socially responsible and contributing to your community (for example, volunteering)

○ being timely—completing work on time to meet project deadlines; arriving at meetings on time; responding to messages reasonably quickly

○ maintaining high ethical standards—dealing with people, problems and situations honestly

○ other ____________________
____
____
____

Learning

○ being aware of your personal strengths and areas that need improvement or development

○ setting your own learning goals instead of waiting for someone else to tell you what you should learn

○ learning from your mistakes

○ other ____________________
____
____
____

Exercise Describing your top skills

This exercise will help you to further define your skills and describe them in ways that reflect the details of your own experience. Clear, specific descriptions of your skills, targeted to specific jobs and employers, are the building blocks for effective resumés and impressive job interviews. You'll use them later in the **Marketing Yourself** section, which begins on page 27.

For each item you highlighted in the two previous exercises, ask yourself the questions journalists ask: who, what, when, where, why and how. Use the answers to describe each of your skills as accurately as possible. For example, if you write down the skill *teaching*, ask yourself who you teach, what you teach, when you teach, where you teach, why you teach and how you teach. You might say, "I teach weekly adult vegetarian-cooking classes through a continuing education program in Big City, Alberta, to help people incorporate healthy vegetarian choices into their diets."

A job seeker looking to move into a management position might use the following skill descriptions to emphasize her leadership qualities:

- As project team lead, I assign tasks to team members and set ambitious but realistic milestones to keep the project moving forward.
- I mentor younger employees to help them develop the technical skills they need to get ahead and to help our organization's succession planning.
- I schedule weekly team meetings, set the agenda for the meetings and lead the discussion to keep the team up to date on the progress of the project.
- I contribute programming expertise to management discussions about software architecture and project scope.

See the sample resumés in the section **Crafting high-impact resumés** (page 34) for examples of how skill descriptions are used.

RESOURCE

Need more help identifying your skills?

The following resources can help you name and describe your top skills:

- the publication *Assessing You: The First Step in Career Planning* and *Workability: What You Need to Get and Keep a Job* available at **alis.alberta.ca/publications**
- the *Abilities Exercise* and the *Significant Experiences Exercise* available at **careerinsite.alberta.ca** under "Know Yourself"
- the ALIS Tips *Find Work That "Fits"* and *Do You Have the Skills Employers Want?* available at **alis.alberta.ca/tips**

My top skills

My skills

Who, what, when, where, why and how?

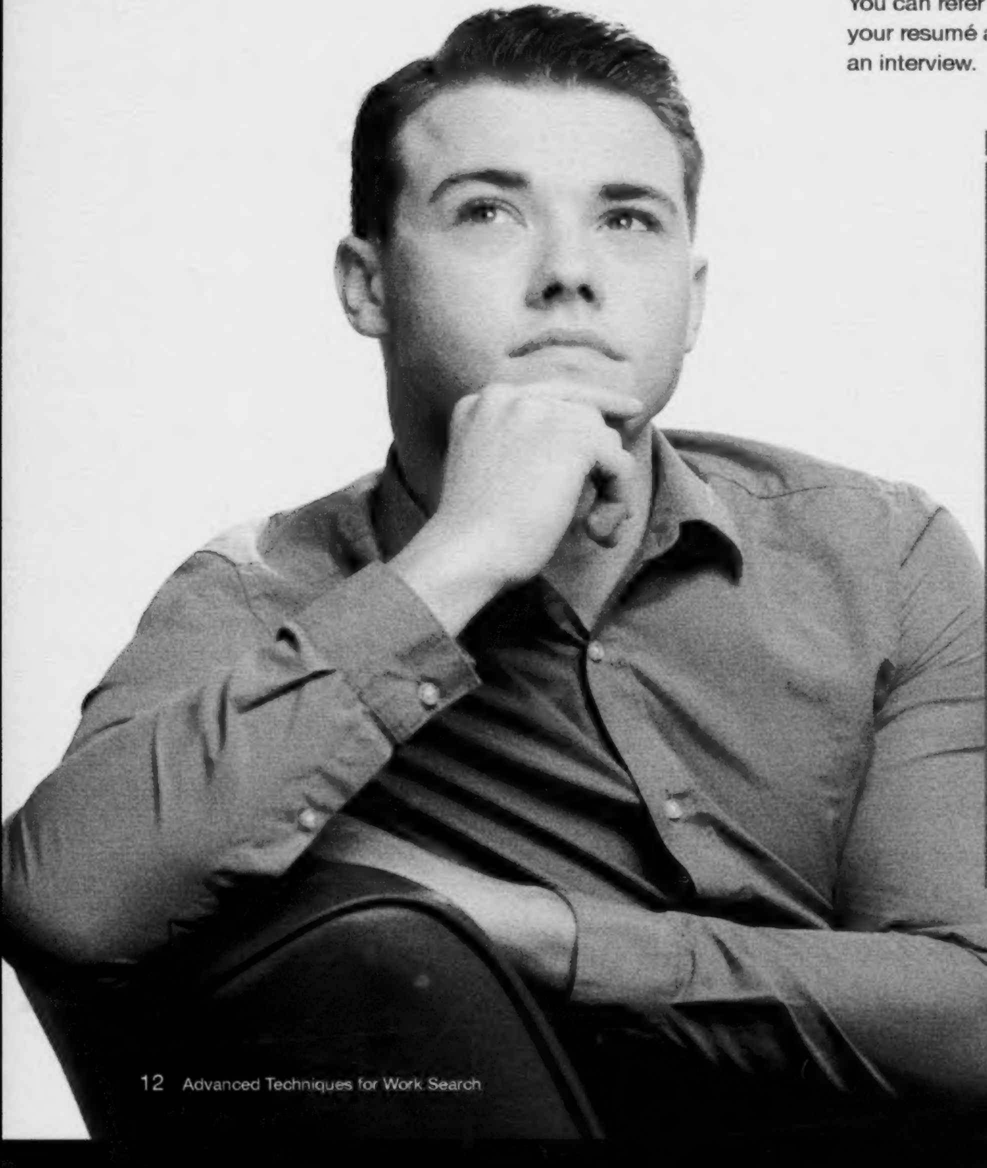
Recognizing your accomplishments

Prospective employers often base their assessment of your future performance on your past performance, which is usually measured by your accomplishments. As a result, describing your accomplishments effectively, both on paper and in person, is a vital step in marketing yourself.

Recognizing and describing your accomplishments will help you

- remember the results you have achieved
- target your work search
- develop outstanding resumés and cover letters
- prepare for job interviews
- boost your confidence

Use the exercises in this section to help you identify and describe your accomplishments. You can refer to these exercises when you write your resumé and cover letter and prepare for an interview.



TIP

What are accomplishments?

Accomplishments are activities that give you pleasure, fulfilment and a feeling of success. Whether they're large or small, routine or extraordinary, your accomplishments represent you at your best. To identify your accomplishments, ask yourself these questions:

- What am I most proud of?
- What do I do better than my co-workers?
- What do my former employers miss most about me?

Exercise Identifying your accomplishments

This exercise will help you to identify the accomplishments you want to emphasize when you are marketing yourself to employers.

STEP 1 Read through the following examples of accomplishments. Check off the ones that relate to something you've accomplished. Add other accomplishments to your list.

STEP 2 Review the accomplishments you've checked off. Highlight or put a star beside the five accomplishments that are most significant or most relevant to the type of work you are seeking.

Employment accomplishments

○ Selected to do tasks that I perform better than my co-workers
○ Trained co-workers
○ Received recognition, awards or bonuses
○ Saved my organization money, time or resources
○ Received recognition for perfect attendance
○ Exceeded performance goals
○ Served in a leadership or senior position, either short or long term
○ Simplified a procedure that made a job easier or more cost-effective
○ Helped develop, implement or maintain a new system
○ Increased customer satisfaction
○ Participated in hiring decisions
○ Led projects
○ Wrote policy or procedures, or contributed to research
○ Organized employee or company activities or functions
○ Other ____________________

Personal accomplishments in the workplace

○ Volunteered for special assignments or extra duties
○ Mentored, coached or helped co-workers
○ Motivated or persuaded others
○ Multi-tasked and met tight deadlines
○ Took on responsibilities beyond those outlined in my job description
○ Contributed to my organization's success through flexibility or adaptability
○ Represented peers as their chosen spokesperson
○ Enhanced the image of my organization
○ Mediated conflict
○ Other ____________________

Education and training

○ Gained specialized knowledge or earned credentials that made me a more valuable employee
○ Achieved honours standing
○ Earned scholarships or awards for academic excellence
○ Improved skills in areas within my field through my own initiative
○ Other ______________________________

Volunteerism and community participation

○ Participated in community groups
○ Held a volunteer or board position
○ Organized or played a key role in community projects
○ Received awards or recognition for contributions to my community
○ Other ______________________________

Exercise Analyzing your accomplishments—STARS

The STARS storytelling technique allows you to articulate what you did and the results you achieved by describing your accomplishments in the following way:

Situation	Describe the circumstances and the problem you faced.
Task	Explain what you needed to do, why you needed to do it and the challenges involved.
Action	Describe the actions you took.
Results	Explain what happened as a result of your efforts.
Skills	Describe the skills you used to accomplish what you did.

You will need to include accomplishment statements in your resumés and cover letters. For examples of how accomplishment statements are used, see the sample resumés on pages 43, 45 and 47 of the **Crafting high-impact resumés** section. Developing accomplishment statements is also excellent preparation for interviews, particularly for behavioural questions that ask you to describe the details of your accomplishments concisely and convincingly.

Create a STARS summary for each of the five most significant accomplishments you identified in the **Identifying your accomplishments** exercise.

RESOURCE

More help on STARS Technique

For more information about the STARS Technique, see the ALIS Tip *Be Prepared for Behavior Descriptive Interviews – Using the STARS Technique*, available at **ALIS.alberta.ca/tips.**

EXAMPLE

STARS accomplishment summary

Situation: The processing time for orders was creating problems. The lag time between receiving an order and shipping it was too long, and orders were getting backlogged. The backlog was creating overtime problems in the shipping area, and customers were complaining.

Task: As department assistant manager, I needed to increase ordering efficiency and reduce overtime. Since the problem involved two different staff units and two different ordering systems (online and phone), it presented logistical and communication challenges. I initiated a review of the ordering systems.

Action: I compiled and analyzed data on order times and shipping backlogs, solicited staff input and researched alternative ordering systems. I presented my findings and recommendations for an integrated phone-and-online system to management, which approved the new system. I managed the start-up of the new system and organized staff training.

Results: Combining the phone and online ordering systems reduced the lag time between order placement and order shipment by two days and reduced overtime for shipping staff by 20 per cent.

Skills: I exercised organizational, communication, analysis, problem-solving, troubleshooting and technical skills.

Exercise Writing accomplishment statements

Condense the descriptions of your accomplishments from the exercise **Analyzing your accomplishments—STARS** into accomplishment statements.

Accomplishment statements used in resumés and cover letters often have the greatest impact when they're condensed to three lines or less. Each accomplishment statement should begin with an action word and should quantify your accomplishment. You may also use qualifiers to add impact to your accomplishment statements (more information about action words, quantifiers and qualifiers follows). Target your accomplishment statements as much as possible to the requirements of the position you are applying for. For sample accomplishment statements, see the example below.

Action words, quantifiers and qualifiers

Action words add punch to descriptions of your accomplishments, responsibilities and activities. Use them as the first words in bulleted lists of skills, accomplishments and responsibilities. Here are some examples:

- **drafted** an orientation manual for all new staff
- **resolved** financial budgeting discrepancies
- **upgraded** in-house processes to improve efficiency in production

Quantifiers describe size, numbers, time and money. Employers want to know the specifics of your accomplishments. They are more likely to believe your accomplishment statements when you can support or substantiate them.

For example, "Trained staff on the inventory system over a period of months with a resulting decline in errors" is a description without a quantifier. Add three quantifiers and the description takes on new meaning and impact: "Trained **150** staff on the inventory system over a period of **three** months with a resulting **75 per cent** decline in errors."

Referring to specific promotions or awards can also strengthen an accomplishment statement.

Qualifiers are adjectives and adverbs that can add depth and focus to descriptions of your accomplishments, skills and knowledge, but they are no replacement for quantifiers. Try not to overuse them. The following are examples of qualifiers:

- analytical
- proficient
- punctual
- specialized
- profitable
- safely
- successfully

To find out more about words you can use to describe skills and accomplishments, see the ALIS Tip *Use Action Words to Get the Job*, available at **alis.alberta.ca/tips**.

EXAMPLE

Accomplishment statements

- doubled sales from $50,000 to $100,000 within two years
- achieved savings of $70,000 through volume discounts and central co-ordination
- promoted from marketing co-ordinator to marketing manager
- received Employee of the Year award for exceptional performance
- took no sick days reported over a three-year period
- answered 70-plus customer service phone calls per day, troubleshooting problems, cutting red tape and making special arrangements, resulting in repeat business
- commended for error-free work
- maintained accurate bookkeeping records and reduced outstanding accounts by 10 per cent
- organized a neighbourhood garage sale, raising $15,000 for a local library
- achieved first-class honours standing throughout post-secondary studies
- implemented a customer feedback system that increased customer satisfaction ratings by 20 per cent
- strengthened team performance by introducing a series of team-building events; received a formal commendation from the vice-president

Understanding your workplace preferences

To *get* what you want, you have to *know* what you want. Some features of your ideal workplace may be based on obvious needs, such as a minimum level of income. Others may not be as obvious.

This section will help you get a clear picture of what is essential to you in a workplace and where you are willing to compromise. It focuses on identifying your preferred

- work type and environment
- work culture
- management style

External and internal values

Workplace features such as geographical location, hours of work or pay are *external values*. If a work opportunity doesn't match your needs or wants with regard to such external values, you'll probably find the workplace to be less than ideal. However, matching your preferences doesn't guarantee that you'll be satisfied with the work itself. Work that you dislike doesn't suddenly become more enjoyable if you get a pay raise.

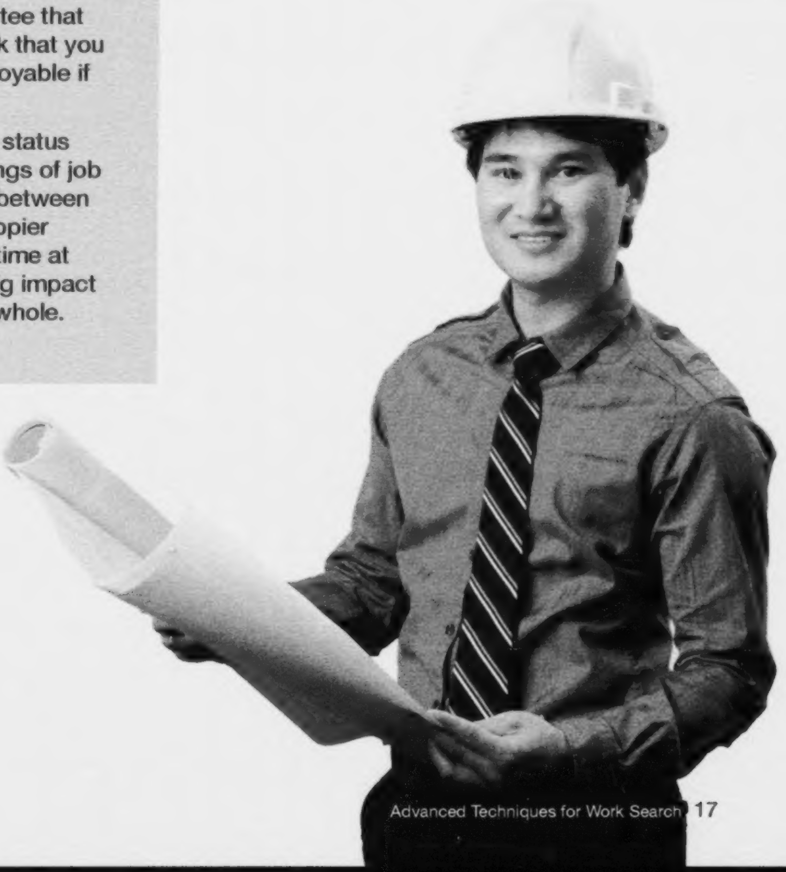
Workplace features such as recognition or status are *internal values* that influence your feelings of job satisfaction. Usually, the better the match between your internal values and your work, the happier you'll be. Since you spend a great deal of time at work, your level of job satisfaction has a big impact on how good you feel about your life as a whole.

Wants versus needs

Needs are things you *must* have to feel fulfilled. Wants are desires, not essential needs. This distinction is important because no work situation is perfect. There is always some compromise involved.

If you find it hard to identify what work type and environment you need or want, begin by thinking about what you *don't* want. For example, if you don't want to work in a downtown office tower, what kind of environment do you want to work in? Outdoors? In a small industrial park?

Work culture differs from one organization to another. If your values and beliefs are compatible with values and beliefs held by most people in an organization, you're more likely to enjoy working there. In particular, a good working relationship with your supervisor is important for job satisfaction and career advancement.



Exercise Your ideal workplace

STEP 1 For each item on the following list, think about whether that factor is essential to you or something you're willing to compromise on based on your work and life experiences to date.

STEP 2 Each "essential" statement limits the number of work opportunities open to you. Review your responses and ask yourself whether you're limiting your search unnecessarily. For example

- If you said you don't want to work for less than a certain amount, do you really need that level of income? Are there ways you could cut back on your spending?
- If you were offered a job that has health care and pension benefits, would you be willing to accept a lower rate of pay?
- If relocating could dramatically increase your chances of finding work, are you willing to move to find suitable employment?

STEP 3 Rank the "essential" items you've checked off in order of importance.

FEATURE	Essential	Willing to compromise	Rank in order of importance
Work type and environment			
Geographic location			
Indoors			
Outdoors			
Stimulating environment			
Hours of work (for example, standard weekday hours, shifts, overtime)			
Pay			
Job security			
Size and type of organization			
Equipment, tools and furniture			
Working with others			
Working alone			
Direct supervision			
Independence			
Vacation and other benefits			
Nature of the work			
Challenge			
Adventure			
Travel			
Variety in the job			

FEATURE	Essential	Willing to compromise	Rank in order of importance
Being part of a team			
A sense of accomplishment			
Opportunities to learn and advance			
Level of responsibility			
Input into decision-making			
Recognition			
Status and respect			
Opportunities to influence or coach others			
Time for self or family			
Opportunity to contribute to society			
Opportunity to supervise others			
Influence over policy			
Creativity			
Social relationships			
Working with my mind			
Working with my hands			
Other:			
Work culture			
The organization's mission is clearly understood by all employees.			
Employees have a strong sense of loyalty to the organization.			
The organization does what it says it will do.			
Employees consistently interact in positive ways.			
The organization balances its needs with employees' needs.			
Management practices are consistent and predictable.			
The organization supports and develops good leaders.			
The organization is able to retain good people.			
Developmental feedback is provided at all levels of the organization.			
Creativity and innovation are rewarded.			
People are treated fairly and with respect.			
The organization encourages and responds to employee input.			
The organization treats employees as its greatest asset.			
Physical facilities are attractive and conducive to productivity.			

FEATURE	Essential	Willing to compromise	Rank in order of importance
Salaries are compatible with levels of responsibility.			
Salaries are consistent with the marketplace.			
Employment and compensation practices demonstrate equal opportunity.			
Fringe benefits are comparable to other organizations' benefits.			
Individual contributions are recognized (pay for performance).			
The organization is committed to employee development.			
Management style Having a supervisor who			
Treats everyone fairly			
Is technically knowledgeable and competent			
Delegates work, clearly stating objectives and timelines			
Delegates the necessary authority as well as responsibility			
Gives me a fair degree of control and autonomy			
Provides necessary training and development			
Encourages creativity			
Is available when I need to discuss a problem			
Is decisive			
Gives credit for good work			
Provides regular, constructive feedback			
Supports staff when appropriate			
Is friendly and acknowledges team members daily			
Criticizes the behaviour, not me, if my performance is a problem			
Has realistic expectations of me			
Keeps the team informed of the organization's challenges and expectations			
Approaches goal-setting as a shared process			
Compensates team members fairly and equitably			
Holds regular performance reviews			
Fosters my career development			
Helps me learn from my mistakes			
Is a positive role model			
Is an inspiring coach			
Is honest			
Has integrity			

Assessing potential workplaces

As you conduct your work search, keep in mind the essential features you identified in the previous exercise. The clearer you are about your priorities, the better prepared you'll be to assess potential employers and work situations and to target your search.

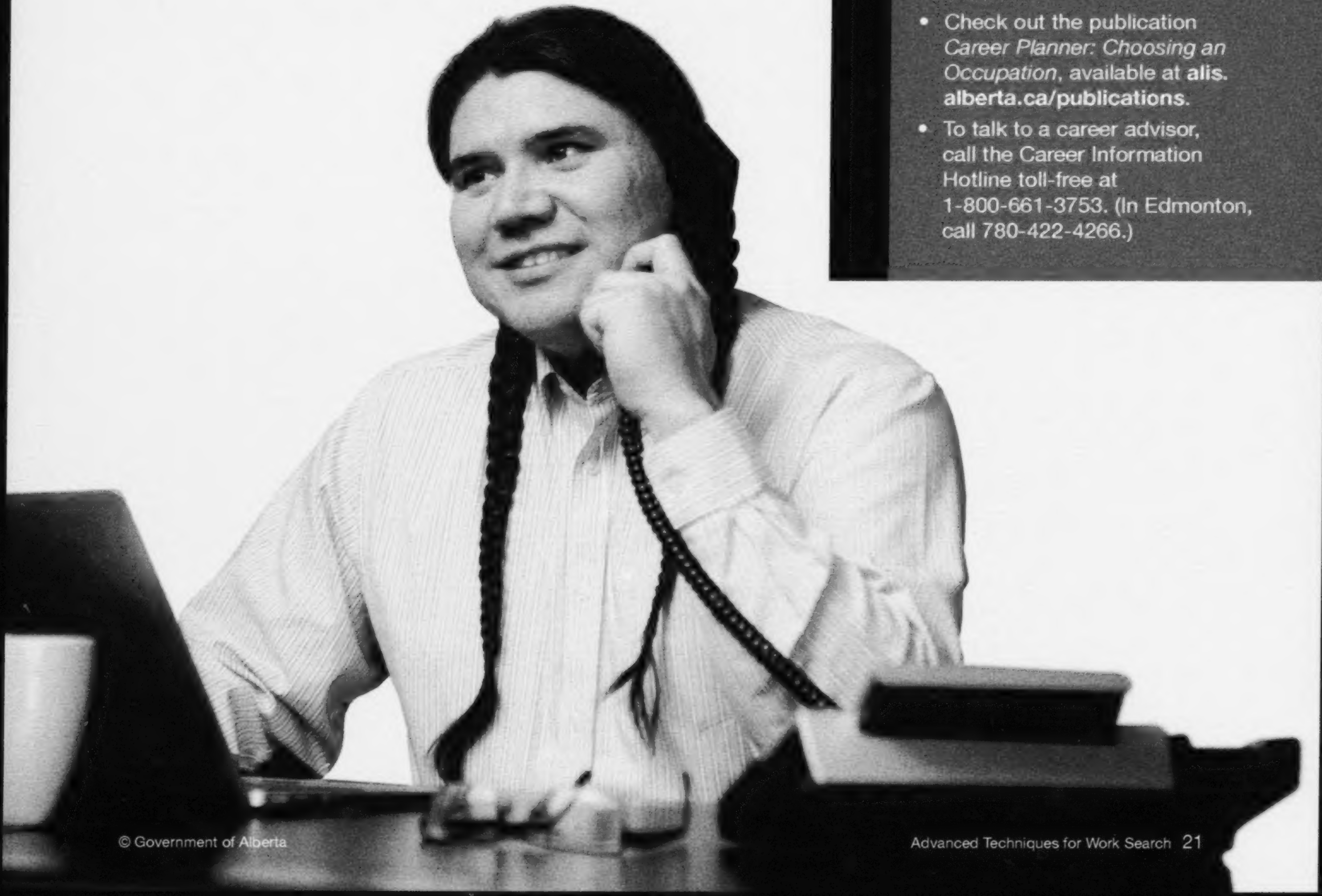
Understanding your preferences can be especially helpful if you're trying to decide between two or more potential jobs. If an organization offers all or most of the items on your list, you'll know that it's likely a good fit for you.

RESOURCE

Do you need to do some career planning?

If you've had trouble determining your workplace wants and priorities, you may need to do some career planning before you're ready to start looking for work.

- Go to CAREERinsite at **careerinsite.alberta.ca**. Click on "Know Yourself" and try the *Preferred Working Conditions Quiz*, the *Work Values Quiz*, the *Interests Exercise* and the *Vision Exercise*.
- Check out the publication *Career Planner: Choosing an Occupation*, available at **alis.alberta.ca/publications**.
- To talk to a career advisor, call the Career Information Hotline toll-free at 1-800-661-3753. (In Edmonton, call 780-422-4266.)



Researching employers

Once you have a good understanding of your skills and accomplishments and a clear idea of what you need and want from a workplace, it's time to move on to the next phase of your work search: finding the employers who need your skills and fit your preferences.

You probably already have some ideas about potential employers you might like to work for. Research will allow you to gather more information about these and other employers, to generate leads and to target your work search.

This section will help you

- explore diverse research sources
- plan for and conduct information interviews

Information sources

You can use a wide array of resources to identify potential employers and find out more about them.

Career and company websites

The Internet offers extensive and up-to-date information on most subjects, and employment topics are no exception. Try the following online resources:

- **Employers' websites**. Explore the sites of employers you want to work for. Browse through press releases, annual reports, mission statements, awards, product and service profiles, and names and emails of key contacts. You never know what information might provide insight into the company, suggest how you should target your resumé or help you answer an interview question. Even the tone and look of the site can tell you a lot about the company's culture and values. A thorough review of an organization's website can even take the place of an information interview. (See page 24 for details about information interviewing.)
- **Professional sites and forums**. Industry, professional and alumni association sites can be sources for links to potential employers. Industry- and occupation-related discussion forums and professional discussion groups (for example, on LinkedIn) offer an opportunity to keep up with current developments and network with others in your field.
- **Blogs**. Typing industry- or employer-related terms into a search engine may connect you to relevant blogs. You may even find a blog written by a current employee in the industry—sometimes with the organization's blessing, sometimes without. Bear in mind that a blog features one individual's point of view and is unlikely to be objective. Nevertheless, a blog can offer a perspective that you may not get from the organization's official website.

Job fairs

Job fairs are a growing trend in Alberta as employers look for different ways to attract and recruit staff. Often hosted by educational institutions, industry groups or major corporations, job fairs let you check out a number of potential employers at the same venue. (Larger corporations may hold their own job fairs or open houses.) You can gather useful information and get a feel for an organization by viewing the display and talking with the staff. You may also be able to submit your resumé or apply for a position. Watch for job fair ads posted at Alberta Works Centres, online at **humanservices.alberta.ca/jobfairs** or in the business section of local newspapers.

Alberta Works Centres

Alberta Works Centres offer staff and resources that can help you learn more about industries, occupations and employers. See the **Resources** section (page 95) for more information.

News sources

News sources offer plenty of information about

- your local labour market
- what's happening in other locations (if you're willing to relocate for employment)
- how conditions are expected to change in the future

If you see an article about a company developing a new product, think about the effects this could have on the local labour market:

- The company might soon be looking for people to help produce, distribute and sell its new product, needing, for example, production line workers, warehousing technicians and sales representatives.
- If the company is expanding, it may also be looking for other types of workers, including administrative assistants, accountants, business management consultants, network administrators and purchasing agents.
- Producing the new product will require raw materials. This may mean that local suppliers and distributors could also be expanding their workforces in the near future.

Your local public library

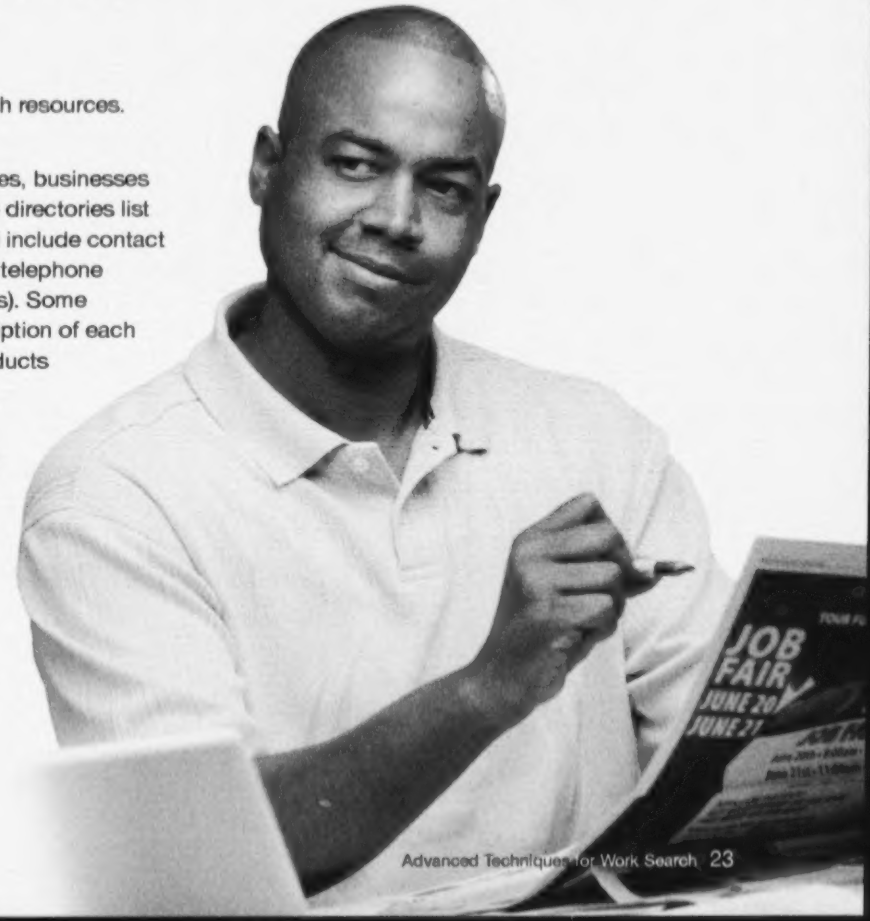
Libraries provide many work search resources. Here are some examples:

- directories of community services, businesses and manufacturing firms. These directories list employers, often by region, and include contact information (mailing addresses, telephone numbers and website addresses). Some directories also provide a description of each organization's services and products and the names of key contacts.
- labour market information published by federal, provincial and local government agencies. Examples include Statistics Canada and provincial and municipal economic development departments.
- information published by local chambers of commerce and other business and professional organizations
- computers with Internet access
- online resources such as databases, directories, newspapers and industry magazines
- annual reports for major employers in your area

Telephone directories

Yellow Pages and other phone directories of cities or towns and their regions are available online and in print. These directories list businesses and organizations in categories, which can help you identify potential employers. For example, an accountant might look in the Accountants category in the Yellow Pages to find a listing of accountant businesses. Your local library or Alberta Works Centre may have print copies of the Yellow Pages or other directories for your area and others. You can access the electronic version of the yellow pages at **yp.ca**.

Another telephone number resource that lists businesses and organizations by category is available online at **411.ca**.



Information interviewing

Information interviewing is a research tool based on the idea that if you want to find out what it's like working in a particular job or for a particular company, you should talk to someone who does that type of work, or someone who works there. The purpose of an information interview is to ask for information, not to ask for a job. You can talk with people you know as well as those you're referred to.

Before you contact someone for an information interview, decide what kind of information you're looking for. It will probably fall into one of the following three categories:

- *occupational information*—if you're thinking about moving into a different field of work
- *industry information*—if you're planning to target your work search to a specific industry
- *information about a specific employer*—if you want to target a particular company or organization

Preparing for an information interview

Follow these steps to prepare for an information interview:

- Prepare your questions. See the **Deciding what questions to ask** section on this page.
- Prepare a script for each contact. See the exercise **Developing an information interview script** on page 26.
- Make initial contact with the person. If you don't know the person, introduce yourself and say who referred you.
- Briefly explain the kind of information you're looking for.
- Ask whether the person would be willing to speak with you for 10 or 15 minutes.
- Keep track of the calls you make. See the section **Tracking your contacts** for suggestions.

Be prepared for one of three answers:

- "Yes, certainly." In this case, try to arrange a face-to-face meeting, or ask to conduct the interview by phone or email.
- "No, I'm sorry." Accept graciously and, if appropriate, ask if another time might be better or if the person can recommend someone else for you to talk to.
- "Let's talk over the phone right now." Always have your questions ready when you make your initial call!

Contacting people you know

Begin the information interviewing process with people you know. You may know someone who

- works for an employer you'd like to work for
- knows about an employer you'd like to work for
- can refer you to someone who works for an employer you'd like to work for

See the **Brainstorming your network** sidebar on page 28 for tips about considering people you may want to start with. Phone or email several of these people. Tell them that you're looking for work and ask them for ideas or, if appropriate, conduct an information interview.

Contacting people you don't know

Through networking or other research, you may be referred to people you don't know who can provide you with more information.

What's the worst that can happen when you contact people you don't know? They may tell you they can't or don't want to talk with you. What's the best that can happen? You may get an insider's perspective on an industry or organization.

Deciding what questions to ask

To be effective in an information interview, you need to be clear about the kind of information you're seeking.

To gather **occupational information**, consider asking the following questions:

- What does this occupation involve on a day-to-day basis?
- What skills does it require?
- What set of values does it reflect?
- How do people enter this field—both the usual and the unusual approaches?
- What do you like and dislike about this occupation?

- Would it be possible for me to job shadow you to learn more about this occupation?

To gather **industry information**, consider asking the following questions:

- What kinds of people are attracted to positions in this industry? What are their values? What motivates them?
- What changes and challenges is the industry facing?
- What are the cyclical patterns of this industry?
- What credentials or training programs are most respected within the industry?
- What are the unspoken expectations for people who work in this industry?
- What industry organizations or associations would you recommend? Are there trade publications or journals that would be helpful to someone interested in this industry?

To gather **employer-specific information**, consider asking the following questions:

- What are some of the key challenges in your position?
- What qualifications are required for someone to work in this position?
- What do you like most about your job with this organization?
- What do you like least about your job with this organization?
- How did you find your current job?
- What advice would you give someone who wants to work for this organization?
- Who else do you recommend I talk to about this organization?
- Who does the hiring in your organization? (Ask this question if you were unable to find this information through your research.)

TIP

Make your information interview a success

- Call or arrive on time.
- Take only as much time as you've requested—10 or 15 minutes should be long enough.
- When you make contact in person or by phone, make sure you have your script and a copy of your cover letter and resumé in front of you. (See the **Marketing Yourself** chapter, which begins on page 27, for help preparing a cover letter and resumé.)
- Dress professionally for the meeting. Speak slowly and clearly, and relax.
- Take detailed notes.
- Thank the person at the end of the meeting or phone call.
- Always follow up with a thank-you card or email. It will leave a good impression, and some of the people you talk to may be in a position to influence future hiring decisions.

Tracking your contacts

Keep track of the people you contact for information interviews. You may want to make note of the following details:

- contact name
- organization
- address, phone and email address
- date and time of contact
- comments
- thank-you note or email sent
- other follow-up completed or required

The interactive *Work Search Plan and Record*, available at **alis.alberta.ca/wsrecord**, is a tool you can use to keep track of your contacts and other work search information.

Exercise Developing an information interview script

Use this worksheet to develop a script for each information interview. Your script may be different for each contact. Avoid memorizing your script or reading it to your contact word for word. Practise getting your main points across using words that seem natural to you.

Date: ______________________________

Script for (indicate name of contact here): ______________________________

Briefly introduce yourself. Include some information about your background, if appropriate. __________

____

____

Tell the person you're interviewing how you found out about them (referral, website, job ad, newsletter or other publication, business pages, etc.). ______________________________

____

____

If you have any knowledge about the occupation, industry or company, referring to it at this point will catch the contact's attention. ______________________________

____

Depending on what you want from the interview, ask for

- ○ the information you're looking for, based on the section **Deciding what questions to ask** (page 24)
- ○ feedback or advice about your skills or resumé
- ○ referrals and whether you can use the person's name or contact him or her for additional information
- ○ other support or information

Thank the person at the end of the meeting, email or phone call. Note any additional follow-up required.

____

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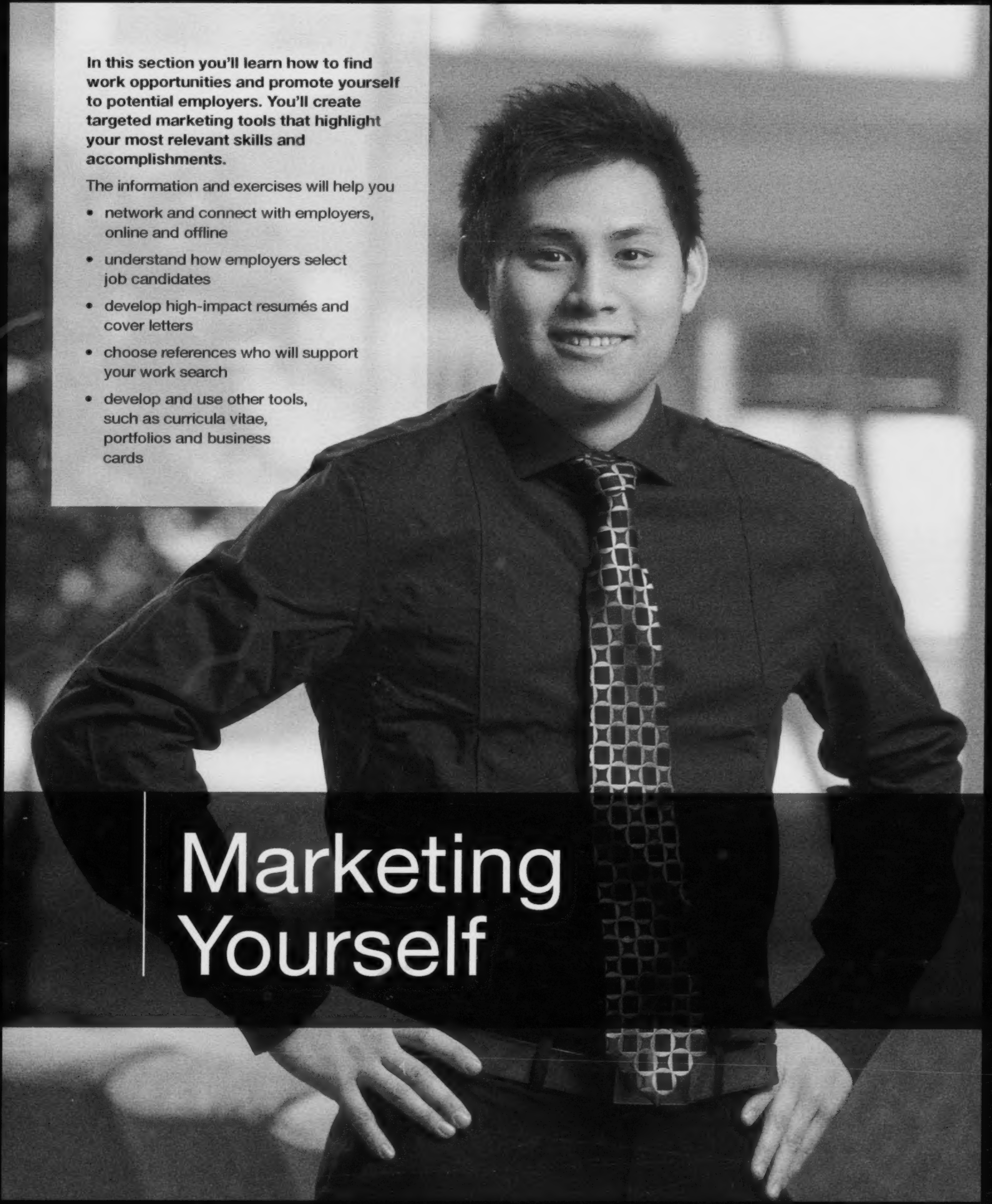


In this section you'll learn how to find work opportunities and promote yourself to potential employers. You'll create targeted marketing tools that highlight your most relevant skills and accomplishments.

The information and exercises will help you

- network and connect with employers, online and offline
- understand how employers select job candidates
- develop high-impact resumés and cover letters
- choose references who will support your work search
- develop and use other tools, such as curricula vitae, portfolios and business cards

Marketing Yourself

Finding work opportunities

Once you have researched the industry and employers that interest you, it's time to look for specific job opportunities. This section focuses on finding work by

- networking, both online and offline
- contacting employers directly
- using employment or placement agencies

Traditional networking

Networking is possibly the single most important work research tool available. It's estimated that 70 to 80 per cent of jobs are filled by people who heard about the opportunity from someone else or contacted the employer directly to find out whether the organization had an opening.

Networking is the process of connecting with all of the people you know and asking them to help you directly or refer you to someone else. Ask people you know for support, advice and information about occupations, industries and specific employers. Chances are there's someone in your network who can connect you to the kind of opportunity you're looking for. Give a copy of your resumé or business card to everyone in your network. The more they know about you, the more effectively they can promote you.

The strength of weak ties

Which people in your network are most likely to connect you to a job opportunity? Surprisingly, studies show that acquaintances may be more helpful in your work search than close friends and family. One reason is that they are more likely to know about leads you haven't already heard about. Another is that people with whom you don't have a strong personal relationship may find it easier to view you in a professional light.

If there's an established professional association in your field, join it. Contact the association about job leads. Watch for leads on the association's website and in its newsletter. Consider posting your resumé on the association's website or placing an ad promoting your services and strengths. Expand your network by attending association and other professional meetings, lunches, conferences and activities. The more people you meet, the more likely you'll be to connect with someone who may be able to help you.

TIP

Brainstorming your network

When you're trying to come up with your network, list as many people as you can. Include friends and family members, but don't limit yourself to the people you're closest to or most comfortable contacting. Also consider

- neighbours
- current and former co-workers
- parents of children's friends
- contacts from community groups (volunteer groups, clubs, religious organizations)
- former classmates
- former teachers
- friends' family members

As your network expands, add new contacts to your list.

Social media and networking online

Networking online allows you to contact people you'd likely never meet through traditional networking methods and to maintain contact with people you do know. Some of the most effective tools for networking online are social media websites such as LinkedIn, Facebook and Twitter.

- **LinkedIn** is a professional networking site. It allows you to outline your background, skills and experience and add people you know to your network. Your direct contacts' connections become second-degree connections in your LinkedIn network, and their contacts become third-degree connections. LinkedIn also includes job postings and discussion groups on a wide variety of professional topics.
- **Facebook** is primarily for personal networking, but because it is such a large social media website, it is also an important professional networking tool. Posting on Facebook is an efficient way to let your contacts know that you're looking for work.
- **Twitter** is an information network where people and organizations have conversations using short messages called "tweets." Twitter is primarily a public forum—you can follow people you don't know—so it's a good way to exchange information outside your immediate professional and social circles.

TIP

Manage your web presence

Many employers use social media to pre-screen potential candidates. Whether or not you actively use social media for professional purposes, employers may search for your LinkedIn, Facebook or Twitter profiles, or read your blog. An unprofessional web presence can hurt your chances of being hired, while a positive impression can help. For this reason, it's important to be aware of and manage the information that is publicly available about you online. Google yourself once in a while so that you know what potential employers will see if they search your name.

It's important to keep your profiles up to date and avoid any unprofessional content in your personal profiles. Keep in mind that being professional doesn't mean erasing all traces of your personality—you still want to be yourself in all your online profiles.

RESOURCE

More help with networking

For more information on networking and social media tools, check out the ALIS Tips *Networking*, *Networking Online*, *Use Social Media for Work Search* and *Managing Your Social Media Identity*, available at **alis.alberta.ca/tips.**

Beyond the social media sites, you can also participate in newsgroups and discussion forums related to the industry or employment field you want to work in. Professional associations and alumni organizations may sponsor or provide links to online networking sites. Or you can use a search engine to discover sites in your area of interest. Some of the most effective online networking sites ask you to become a member of the site by submitting a profile describing your experience and work background. This lets all members search the site for others who share their interests.

Contacting employers directly

When you identify employers that interest you, contact them directly to inquire about work, whether or not they are currently advertising positions.

Cold-calling

Cold-calling is unsolicited contact with a prospective employer without a referral. Before you make a cold call, the first step is to identify the right person to talk to or address your resumé to.

- Use current classified and career ads to target employers who may have unadvertised job openings in your field. Use the contact information in the ad to send an unsolicited resumé with an introductory cover letter. The **Letters of inquiry** section on page 63 includes a sample letter.
- If you're contacting employers in person, call ahead and ask who has hiring authority for your type of work. Typical titles of people with hiring authority include foreman, supervisor, human resources manager or consultant, manager or assistant manager. Find out when this person may be available. When you walk in, ask for the person by name.
- When contacting employers by phone, ask for the name of the person who has hiring authority. If the person who answers is reluctant to put your call through to the appropriate person, call back another day and ask for the hiring authority by name.
- Using "To Whom It May Concern" in letters or email is usually ineffective. If you can't find out by calling the organization directly, locate the names of specific people through your network, on the organization's website or in a business directory.
- You may also want to talk to someone who doesn't have hiring authority, such as an employee of the organization in a position similar to one you're interested in. Explain to the person who answers your call what you'd like to do and ask to speak with someone who can answer your questions.

When contacting people, always keep in mind the following:

- Do your research! Check out the company's published material before you make contact.
- Ask for the names of the people you talk to, including receptionists. Write their names down and use them in conversation. If you have to call back, it's helpful to know people's names.
- Be polite.
- Keep your calls and emails short and to the point.

If you're prepared and professional, people will be more likely to tell you what they know and refer you to others who may also be able to help you.

TIP

Target your inquiries

Resist the temptation to simply mail out a number of resumés. Target specific employers and deliver a customized resumé personally (which gives you the opportunity to look around and check out the organization) or email it with a cover letter expressing your interest and motivation. See the **Tailoring your resumé** section on page 34 for more information.

Job ads and job search websites

About 20 per cent of positions are advertised. Although useful for identifying potential employers and job leads, online and offline job postings have some disadvantages:

- Since many people use classified job ads to find work, competition for these positions is often keen.
- Unless there's a specified competition deadline, advertised positions fill very quickly (often within 24 hours).
- Not all employers advertise positions. Many choose to fill positions through walk-ins, via referrals or from within the company.

In addition to job ads in the classified or careers section of newspapers, the Internet is teeming with job search websites where employers list the jobs they have available and job seekers post their resumés. Many websites also offer work search articles and tips. The provincial and federal governments also maintain job banks:

- The Alberta Learning Information Service (ALIS) website at **alis.alberta.ca/jobpostings** has links to more than 190 job posting sites.
- A listing of jobs from across Canada is available at **jobbank.gc.ca**.

RESOURCE

Vertical search engines

In contrast to general search engines like Google, vertical search engines focus on a particular type of content. Vertical job search engines pull information from many different job search boards, so they are an efficient way to look for opportunities posted online. You can typically search by keyword and location.

Some popular Canadian vertical job search engines are

- Eluta Canada (**eluta.ca**)
- Indeed Canada (**indeed.ca**)
- WowJobs (**wowjobs.ca**)

You can search most job sites by keyword, job type or job title and location.

Many sites allow you (and thousands of others!) to post your resumé in hopes of capturing the interest of an employer or recruiter. Keep in mind that every other job seeker with an Internet connection can do the same. Posting your resumé on numerous job sites, blasting (mass emailing) your resumé to a number of employers or spending hours surfing for work search tips may give you the illusion that you've accomplished a lot when, ultimately, these approaches alone are unlikely to get you an interview.

Many job websites offer a job agent or job match service. When you post your resumé or skills profile, the service updates you regularly by email, alerting you to new postings that fit your qualifications. This kind of service can save you time and money.

If you decide to post your resumé on a job search website, try to edit or alter some of the information every two weeks. This effectively reposts your resumé with the current date and ensures that your resumé stays active on the site: many recruiters search resumés by date posted.

The postings you find on job search websites can help you identify potential employers and find additional postings through employer or recruiter websites. An increasing number of employers maintain an active list of job openings, including jobs that are not posted on job search websites or in newspapers.

RESOURCE

Getting started with your online work search

For more information on how and where to look for work opportunities online, look at the ALIS Tips *Using the Internet for Work Search: Getting Started* and *Using the Internet for Work Search: Finding Jobs and Work Opportunities*, available at **alis.alberta.ca/tips.**

Using employment or placement agencies

Private employment agencies are contracted by employers to find candidates to fill specific positions. Sometimes, newspaper ads and online postings tell job seekers to submit their resumés directly to this kind of agency. You can do this, but keep in mind that the agency's job is to recruit for the employer, who is the agency's client.

You may decide to submit your resumé to a placement agency that specializes in placing people who have qualifications similar to yours (for example, business administration or engineering design). You may submit your resumé either for a specific position or to be kept on file for future openings, especially if you know that your targeted employers use placement agency services. If your qualifications fit a position the agency is trying to fill, the agency will contact you.

Given the amount of free work search help and information available, it's probably wise to be cautious of agencies that ask for payment to help you with your work search. Before you sign an agreement with any agency, read it carefully and be sure you understand the terms.

Depending on the industry and the kind of work you're interested in, contacting an agency can be a useful strategy. Just make sure it's only one of several strategies you pursue. Continue to use the other methods described in this section as you look for work.

Understanding the selection process

Take a moment to imagine yourself as an employer who needs to fill a position. Before you begin recruiting, you decide what kinds of skills and other qualifications the ideal employee will have. You describe these requirements in the job posting.

You may receive hundreds of resumés or applications for the position. Some will meet your requirements; many won't. How do you decide whom to interview, never mind whom to hire?

How employers screen applications

Most employers follow a selection process to compare their requirements with the skills and qualifications of the applicants. The process will depend on the size and nature of the organization. Most large organizations use applicant tracking system software to review and store resumés electronically. This software searches for keywords and phrases, and ranks each resumé against the selection criteria and other candidates' resumés.

At a smaller organization, the employer may be the first person to look at the dozens (and sometimes hundreds) of resumés received in response to the job posting, or this task may be assigned to the hiring manager, a recruiting agent or a human resources employee.

No matter how the task is handled, the goal is to screen out as many resumés as possible in order to narrow down the number of applicants who will be evaluated more closely. Although the exact process is different for each organization, an employer will probably screen applicants by sorting them into three groups:

- A—those who demonstrate that they exceed all the criteria
- B—those who demonstrate that they meet all or most of the criteria
- C—those who do not demonstrate that they meet the criteria

Several factors will influence how many candidates will be interviewed, including the time and staff available, the skill level of the position and the number of positions to be filled. Probably only the top eight to 10 candidates from group A will be interviewed. If the position can't be filled from group A, or if the employer wants to keep options open, the most outstanding candidates from group B may also be interviewed.

What employers are looking for

Resumés are screened using a set of criteria that include the requirements of the job as well as other needs and preferences the employer has identified. If the employer is looking at dozens of resumés from applicants who have most or all of the necessary criteria, he or she will probably select those that

- are easy to read and error-free, reflecting the applicant's desire to do high-quality work
- clearly highlight the relevant qualifications for the position posted
- describe the relevant qualifications using the same or similar keywords that appear in the job ad or posting or, for unadvertised positions, that are standard in the industry

The following section describes in detail how best to showcase your qualifications to get your resumé through the screening process.

Crafting high-impact resumés

A well-written resumé is a key element of your work search. It's a one- or two-page summary of your skills, accomplishments, experience and training. Your resumé is a marketing tool you give to a prospective employer in order to

- make a good first impression
- demonstrate how your skills and accomplishments meet the employer's requirements
- get an interview

The effectiveness of your resumé will depend on

- what information you include and how well you tailor it to the position
- how you organize the information
- the words you use, including keywords and accomplishment statements

Tailoring your resumé

Tailoring your resumé means highlighting relevant qualifications to show a specific employer that you have the skills, experience and training to succeed in a particular job. Doing so demonstrates that you place a high priority on the employer's needs. To tailor your resumé, you need to

- learn about the employer
- understand the job requirements from the employer's point of view
- identify your most relevant qualifications
- choose the resumé type that will best highlight your qualifications (See the sample resumés on pages 43, 45 and 47.)
- describe your qualifications in keywords and phrases that are the same or similar to those that appear in the job ad or posting, if there is one

Your approach will vary depending on the occupation or industry you want to work in and the qualifications you want to emphasize. For example, if you're a pilot, your resumé will probably be most effective if you follow the industry standard and list the details of the aircraft you're licensed to fly near the top of the first page. On the other hand, if you're a pilot seeking a career change, it's probably a good idea to highlight your strongest employability skills—such as personal and teamwork skills that are essential regardless of occupation.

If you're applying for more than one type of work, you'll need more than one resumé. You'll continue to write and rewrite your resumé and your other marketing tools throughout your work search. Tailor your resumé to each specific job you apply for and change information as your skills, achievements and experiences evolve.

TIP

References available upon request?

Don't include your references with your resumé unless an employer specifically asks for them in the job ad or posting. Most employers don't require this information until you've been shortlisted for the job.

Should you use the phrase "References available upon request" in your resumé? Most human resources and career development professionals note that since employers expect you to provide references anyway, using this phrase is stating the obvious.

EXAMPLE

Three fields, three resumés

Janet Jobin is interested in three types of work:

- firefighter
- telecommunications technologist
- supervisor of telephone installers

Since each position requires different skills and knowledge, Janet will need at least three different resumés. Her basic resumé for firefighting positions should emphasize her

- physical strength and agility
- knowledge and understanding of firefighting
- participation in safety training and technical firefighting courses
- teamwork skills and adaptability
- attraction to adventure
- sports and athletic involvement
- commitment to helping others
- volunteer firefighting experience
- background in naval cadets

Her resumé for telecommunications technologist positions should emphasize her

- technical telecommunications skills and journeyman certification
- telecommunications technologist diploma
- special employment-related project assignments
- interpersonal skills
- problem-solving skills

Her resumé for supervisory positions should emphasize her

- ability to motivate
- ability to delegate
- ability to hire, train and coach
- ability to provide feedback
- ability to listen, organize, plan and make decisions
- telecommunications technical expertise
- supervisory or management training
- leadership roles in volunteer, sports and community activities

What to put on your resumé

As you select and organize the content of your resumé, your main goal is to demonstrate that you have the skills and qualifications the potential employer is looking for. The information you include will depend on your experience and credentials as well as the type of work you are seeking, so the formula is not the same for everyone.

The following table outlines the main categories of information that are commonly used on a resumé. It also lists several typical headings for each category of information. Review the sample resumés on pages 43, 45 and 47 to see how to choose and organize content for different types of resumés.

Information commonly used on a resumé

Possible section headings	Content
Contact Information	On the first line of your resumé, include only your name and, if applicable, a designation such as BA or P.Eng. On the following lines, include your address and postal code, phone numbers (including area code) for your home phone and cellphone (if you have one) and your work search email address. You may also want to create an online version of your resumé that does not include most of this personal information. Consider the following suggestions: • To maintain confidentiality and professionalism, don't use your work phone or work email for your work search. • Provide a daytime phone number where messages can be left for you. Interviews are usually arranged by phone during office hours. • Put your name on every page of your resumé. You can use the header or footer function in word-processing software to do this.

Information commonly used on a resumé (continued)

Possible section headings	Content
Career Objective Goal Job Goal Job Target Objective Position Applied for	This is a one- or two-line description of the kind of position you're seeking and your strongest qualification for the position. It's optional. Be aware that objective statements can be used to screen you *out* rather than *in* if they focus on your goals rather than the employer's goals. Some employers feel that objective statements are a waste of valuable resumé space. Vague statements such as "To obtain a challenging position with a progressive company that will allow me to grow and develop my analytical and problem-solving skills" are not likely to grab an employer's attention. You may want to include an objective statement if you are offering a very specific type of expertise. For example, "Have seven years' experience with back-end web development technologies; looking to move into a senior web developer role." You may also want to include an objective if you must find a job for a particular time frame, such as an internship or co-op period. For example, "Eight-month co-op position beginning in the fall term." If you're in doubt about whether to include an objective statement in your resumé, you can always create an objective, write your resumé based on it and then leave it off the final draft. Or you can include your objective in your cover letter.
Background Highlights of Qualifications Profile Summary Summary of Background	This is your opportunity to summarize how your qualifications match the job's requirements. Be sure your experience will back up any statements you make. Include • the number of years in the relevant occupation • relevant education and training • relevant accomplishments • key skills or specialized knowledge • personal skills (such as attitudes or work style) that support your objective

Information commonly used on a resumé (continued)

Possible section headings	Content
Accomplishments Achievements Areas of Effectiveness Capabilities Professional Attributes Results Achieved Skills Strengths Talents	This section features the work-related accomplishments you identified when you completed the exercises in the **Recognizing your accomplishments** section, which begins on page 12. Group skills in sets that reflect the job requirements, and include a bulleted list giving details to support each skill set. If you choose to use a combination resumé (described on page 46), put this information at the beginning, immediately following your name and address or after a summary, if you have one. For screening purposes, employers usually like to see your education and experience first. You can get around listing the details of your experience and education at the top of your resumé by including the highlights in a summary.
Employment Employment Background Employment Experience Employment History Relevant Work History Work Experience Work History	Describe your key responsibilities in this section. Use action words that convey your professionalism, expertise, maturity and experience. (For help with this exercise, check out the **Action words, quantifiers and qualifiers** section on page 16). Whether you choose to use past tense or present tense, be consistent. Try to use numbers and descriptive words to help the employer picture how you work and what you've accomplished for other employers. The term work experience is generally associated with entry-level jobs. It is used for volunteer placements where students have an opportunity to apply classroom knowledge and develop skills. Ensure that your paid employment is not confused with this type of experience.
Background Career Experience Experience Highlights Professional Background Professional Experience Relevant Experience	These are ideal headings if you are combining paid and unpaid experience.

Information commonly used on a resumé (continued)

Possible section headings	Content
Education Education Background Education and Development Educational Development Education and Training Post-Secondary Education Professional Development Training and Development	List your most recent formal education first. You may also want to include a bulleted list of course titles and dates in any subject areas that are particularly relevant to the job. Listing numerous seminars and workshops may take up too much space. Instead, combine these under a heading like "Education and Development" and include a statement such as "Workshops and seminars on computer skills, leadership and supervision, including…" Or highlight one or two subject areas that are particularly relevant to the job and follow with a statement like "Complete list of courses available on request." If you have a degree, diploma or certificate, don't list your high school diploma, since high school completion is usually the prerequisite for post-secondary admission.
Community Involvement Leadership Roles Volunteer Activities	This section is optional. Job seekers often wonder whether it's appropriate to include volunteer activities on a resumé. Many companies are committed to active participation in the community and strongly encourage employees to volunteer. Including this information may show that you are a well-rounded person and may even help get you the job. Include the activities you think will interest a particular employer. You can also use volunteer activities to demonstrate relevant skills and show experience. Under human rights legislation, you're not required to name specific organizations you belong to. Avoid identifying your religious or political affiliations unless this is relevant to the employer. Use your best judgment. Limit this section to one or two lines. It's not necessary to include dates here, although it's fine to do so.
Hobbies Interests Leisure Activities Recreational Activities	Although this section is optional, there are a number of reasons why you may decide to include this information: • It gives employers a glimpse of you as a whole person, not just your professional self. • It supplies information that may help the prospective employer make small talk at the beginning of an interview. • It indicates that you have a balanced lifestyle and recognize the need for recreation and diversion. • Your recreational and leisure interests may involve knowledge and skills relevant to the job. Limit this section to two or three lines. Or combine it with a volunteer or community involvement section under a title such as "Community and Leisure Activities."

Keywords

Keywords are descriptive phrases and words, usually nouns, that may be associated with certain industries or disciplines. By using keywords in your resumé, you're telling employers that you

- have studied certain subjects
- have earned a particular credential
- know how to use specific tools (for example, a computer program or power tools)
- have certain types of skills (for example, public speaking skills or sales ability)

It's important to include keywords in your resumé for two reasons:

- Keywords are considered standard in certain industries and are used by employers to assess skill and experience. For example, an accountant's resumé would include keywords such as budget analysis, spreadsheets, auditing and tax analysis.
- Your resumé may be searched, either by a person or a software program, for keywords that match specific criteria, and then screened out if the keywords or their synonyms aren't included.

Check out the job ad and resumé on pages 42 and 43 for examples of how to identify and use keywords.

Resumé master

A resumé master is a place to keep track of all your experience, qualifications, skills and accomplishments. Think of it as a master document from which you pick and choose relevant skills and accomplishments as you tailor your resumé to reflect the needs of different employers. Keeping your resumé master up to date throughout your career makes it easier to write tailored resumés and prepare for interviews. Not everything you list will go on every resumé that you send out.

For an interactive resumé master worksheet that you can complete, go to **alis.alberta.ca/resumemaster**.

TIP

What keywords should you use?

Here are some ways to choose keywords to describe your qualifications in your resumé and cover letter:

- Use the keywords and phrases that appear in the job ad or posting.
- Visit the employer's website and study the detailed description of the job you're applying for. Browse the rest of the website for additional keywords.
- Visit other related websites, including those of competitors, industry associations, trade publications and sites with occupational profiles to gather current industry keywords.
- Enter keywords into a search engine or into the search function of a job postings website. Reviewing several ads for similar positions will give you a better idea of the keywords to use.
- File (on computer or on paper) every ad you respond to for future reference.
- Talk to people in the industry or company and ask them about the qualifications for the position.

Resumé types

There are three basic resumé types: chronological, functional and combination. The type of resumé you choose will depend on your experience and your work search target. For example, if you're applying for a position that's similar to a current or previous position, a chronological format may be the most effective way to highlight your experience. However, if you're planning to change careers or industries, a functional or a combination resumé will highlight your relevant skills.

You can also ask an employer directly what type of resumé the organization prefers. Call the organization's main number and ask to speak to the human resources department or the hiring manager for the position you're interested in.

The following chart compares the three resumé types.

Which resumé type is right for you?

Resumé type	Advantages	Disadvantages	Use to...
Chronological	• looks most familiar • highlights employment history • can show consistent employment or upward mobility in the same field or industry • highlights prior positions and employers	• exposes potential barriers such as gaps in employment, frequent job changes and lack of experience or career progress • highlights employment history rather than skills	• highlight a steady work history that directly relates to the position applied for • apply for a position in a more traditional field such as teaching or government work
Functional	• emphasizes skills and accomplishments • provides plenty of scope for tailoring to reflect employer's needs • de-emphasizes gaps in employment history and employment barriers such as little previous experience in a particular field or frequent job changes	• does not appeal to most Canadian employers • highlights skills rather than employment history • requires that you know what skill areas the employer would be interested in	• change careers or industry • re-enter the labour market after time away • emphasize strong skills developed in unpaid settings such as volunteer work • seek a permanent position after doing contract or freelance work
Combination	• combines the best features of both the chronological and the functional resumé • highlights skills as well as condensed employment history • provides more flexibility for tailoring than the chronological format • minimizes potential barriers such as gaps in employment and lack of directly related experience	• can be confusing if not well written • de-emphasizes experience with specific employers • may require more time and focus to organize	• balance the emphasis between relevant skills and employment history

Chronological resumé

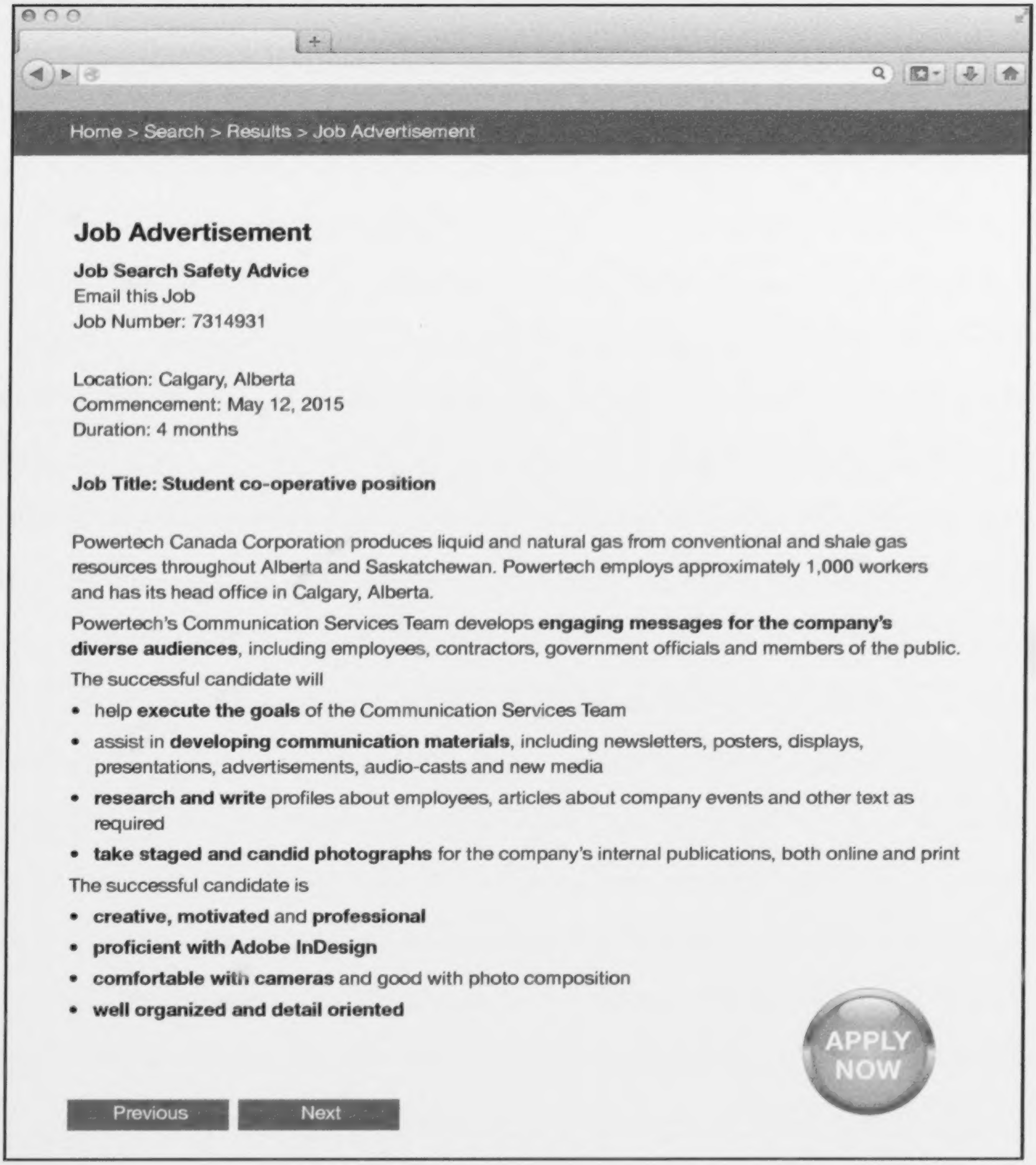
A chronological resumé highlights your employment background, education and training in reverse chronological order, placing your most recent or current experience first. It includes names of organizations and dates of employment. It highlights key duties you have performed, but not how well you have performed them.

Employers often prefer this format because it makes it easier for them to quickly determine whether you have the specific combination of education and experience they require, as well as a steady employment history. However, a chronological resumé may not market your skills as well as a combination resumé if you have gaps in employment, no directly related experience or too little experience.

In the following example, a student job seeker uses a chronological resumé to respond to an online job posting.

Scenario	Emma Puxley is a university student who is completing an English degree. She finds an online posting for a student co-operative position as part of a gas company's communication team. (The posting is shown on page 42.)
Challenges	Because Emma is a student, her professional experience is limited. As well, Emma has never studied photography or photographic composition. She takes pictures only for fun. Finally, Emma has no oil and gas experience.
Assets (skills, accomplishments, benefits)	Emma is a successful student who is working toward an English degree and has a great deal of relevant volunteer communication experience. She can back up the success of some of her activities with statistics.
How Emma tailors her resumé	First, Emma identifies keywords in the job posting. She uses these keywords to tailor her resumé to the specific requirements of the job. Emma uses a chronological resumé to demonstrate that she is a steady worker with a professional attitude. Because the posting is for a student, she begins with her education. She highlights her education awards to downplay her lack of oil and gas knowledge and to indicate that she is a good learner. Emma then combines her volunteer and paid work experiences under the heading "Experience Highlights" to demonstrate her fit for the job. Wherever she can, she gives figures to demonstrate her capabilities or her success, including the number of published stories, the success of the fundraiser and the number of tables in the restaurant. Since four of Emma's candid campus photos have appeared in the university's online newspaper, she lists these to indicate that she is comfortable with cameras. She also lists photography under her hobbies.

The keywords that Emma identifies in the job posting are in bold print.



Job Advertisement

Job Search Safety Advice
Email this Job
Job Number: 7314931

Location: Calgary, Alberta
Commencement: May 12, 2015
Duration: 4 months

Job Title: Student co-operative position

Powertech Canada Corporation produces liquid and natural gas from conventional and shale gas resources throughout Alberta and Saskatchewan. Powertech employs approximately 1,000 workers and has its head office in Calgary, Alberta.

Powertech's Communication Services Team develops **engaging messages for the company's diverse audiences**, including employees, contractors, government officials and members of the public.

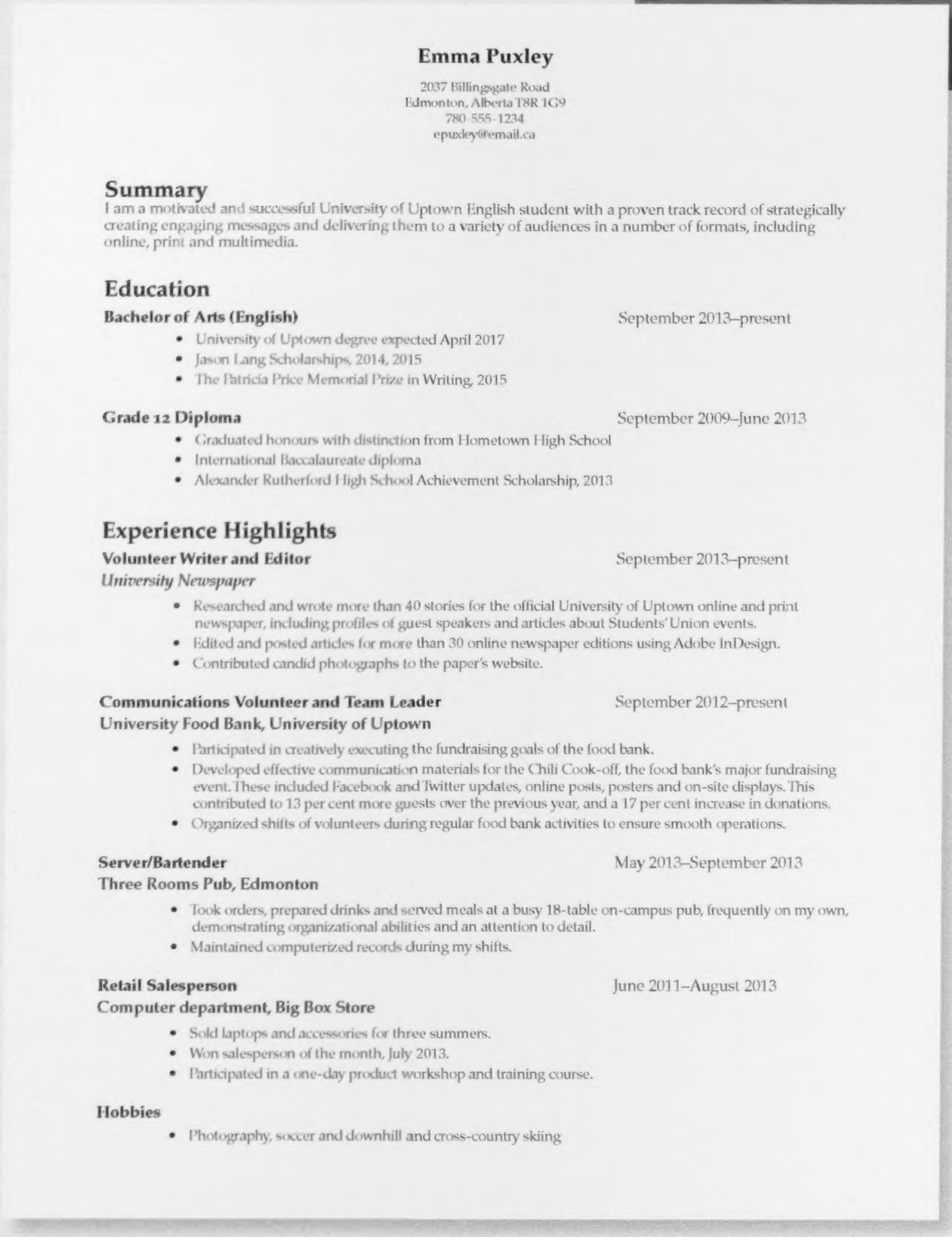
The successful candidate will

- help **execute the goals** of the Communication Services Team
- assist in **developing communication materials**, including newsletters, posters, displays, presentations, advertisements, audio-casts and new media
- **research and write** profiles about employees, articles about company events and other text as required
- **take staged and candid photographs** for the company's internal publications, both online and print

The successful candidate is

- **creative, motivated** and **professional**
- **proficient with Adobe InDesign**
- **comfortable with cameras** and good with photo composition
- **well organized and detail oriented**

Sample chronological resumé



Emma Puxley

2037 Billingsgate Road
Edmonton, Alberta T8R 1G9
780-555-1234
epuxley@email.ca

Summary

I am a motivated and successful University of Uptown English student with a proven track record of strategically creating engaging messages and delivering them to a variety of audiences in a number of formats, including online, print and multimedia.

Education

Bachelor of Arts (English) September 2013–present

- University of Uptown degree expected April 2017
- Jason Lang Scholarships, 2014, 2015
- The Patricia Price Memorial Prize in Writing, 2015

Grade 12 Diploma September 2009–June 2013

- Graduated honours with distinction from Hometown High School
- International Baccalaureate diploma
- Alexander Rutherford High School Achievement Scholarship, 2013

Experience Highlights

Volunteer Writer and Editor September 2013–present
University Newspaper

- Researched and wrote more than 40 stories for the official University of Uptown online and print newspaper, including profiles of guest speakers and articles about Students' Union events.
- Edited and posted articles for more than 30 online newspaper editions using Adobe InDesign.
- Contributed candid photographs to the paper's website.

Communications Volunteer and Team Leader September 2012–present
University Food Bank, University of Uptown

- Participated in creatively executing the fundraising goals of the food bank.
- Developed effective communication materials for the Chili Cook-off, the food bank's major fundraising event. These included Facebook and Twitter updates, online posts, posters and on-site displays. This contributed to 13 per cent more guests over the previous year, and a 17 per cent increase in donations.
- Organized shifts of volunteers during regular food bank activities to ensure smooth operations.

Server/Bartender May 2013–September 2013
Three Rooms Pub, Edmonton

- Took orders, prepared drinks and served meals at a busy 18-table on-campus pub, frequently on my own, demonstrating organizational abilities and an attention to detail.
- Maintained computerized records during my shifts.

Retail Salesperson June 2011–August 2013
Computer department, Big Box Store

- Sold laptops and accessories for three summers.
- Won salesperson of the month, July 2013.
- Participated in a one-day product workshop and training course.

Hobbies

- Photography, soccer and downhill and cross-country skiing

Functional resumé

A functional resumé highlights your skills or accomplishments instead of your employment background, and shows how you've applied your skills. It may omit references to past employment or list past employers without including specific duties or dates.

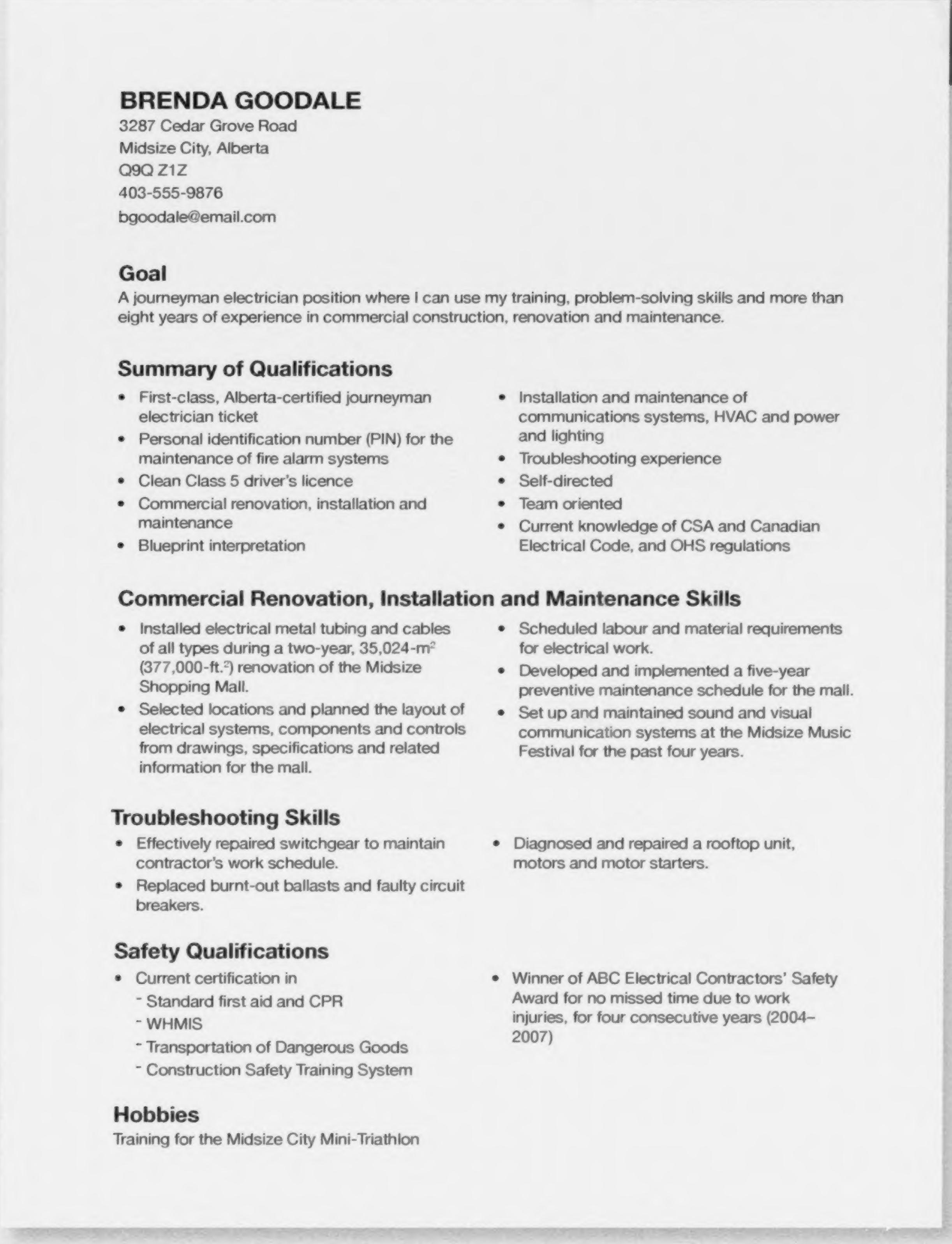
Many Canadian employers aren't familiar with functional resumés and, as a result, they may not respond to them favourably. Employers generally like to see specific details about your employment history because these details allow them to assess your background more quickly. The lack of dates in a functional resumé can sometimes arouse suspicion.

On the other hand, if a chronological or a combination resumé points to gaps in your past employment, a functional resumé may be your best choice. You may decide to use this type of resumé if

- you don't have a paid employment background
- you're making a career change
- you've been out of the labour market for a long time—for example, at home raising a family, not available to work, ill or out of the country travelling

In the following example, a job seeker who is returning to the workforce after several years uses a functional resumé to downplay the gap in her work experience.

Scenario	Brenda Goodale put her career as a journeyman electrician on hold for seven years after the birth of her second child. Now that her children are in school, Brenda is reaching out to former supervisors and co-workers for job leads. Her experience includes working for an electrical contractor who was renovating a local shopping mall and taking an electrical maintenance position with the mall once the renovations were done. For the last four summers she has also volunteered for the local music festival by setting up sound and visual systems. The renovation contractor who used to be Brenda's supervisor lets her know that the City is looking for an electrician for the renovation and maintenance of its recreational facility.
Challenges	Brenda has been out of the paid workforce for seven years.
Assets (skills, accomplishments, benefits)	Before beginning her employment search, Brenda makes sure that she is up to date on the latest codes and regulations for her field.
How Brenda tailors her resumé	Brenda chooses a functional resumé to highlight her skills and qualifications and downplay her seven-year absence from the workforce. Because the City is looking for renovation and maintenance skills, Brenda calls attention to different skills from her paid and unpaid positions under the heading "Commercial Renovation, Installation and Maintenance Skills." She uses the "Troubleshooting Skills" category to demonstrate electrical skills in specific areas. Brenda highlights her safety qualifications to demonstrate her current knowledge. Finally, to demonstrate that she can do the job physically, she lists her triathlon training as a hobby.



BRENDA GOODALE

3287 Cedar Grove Road
Midsize City, Alberta
Q9Q Z1Z
403-555-9876
bgoodale@email.com

Goal

A journeyman electrician position where I can use my training, problem-solving skills and more than eight years of experience in commercial construction, renovation and maintenance.

Summary of Qualifications

- First-class, Alberta-certified journeyman electrician ticket
- Personal identification number (PIN) for the maintenance of fire alarm systems
- Clean Class 5 driver's licence
- Commercial renovation, installation and maintenance
- Blueprint interpretation
- Installation and maintenance of communications systems, HVAC and power and lighting
- Troubleshooting experience
- Self-directed
- Team oriented
- Current knowledge of CSA and Canadian Electrical Code, and OHS regulations

Commercial Renovation, Installation and Maintenance Skills

- Installed electrical metal tubing and cables of all types during a two-year, 35,024-m^2 (377,000-ft.^{2}) renovation of the Midsize Shopping Mall.
- Selected locations and planned the layout of electrical systems, components and controls from drawings, specifications and related information for the mall.
- Scheduled labour and material requirements for electrical work.
- Developed and implemented a five-year preventive maintenance schedule for the mall.
- Set up and maintained sound and visual communication systems at the Midsize Music Festival for the past four years.

Troubleshooting Skills

- Effectively repaired switchgear to maintain contractor's work schedule.
- Replaced burnt-out ballasts and faulty circuit breakers.
- Diagnosed and repaired a rooftop unit, motors and motor starters.

Safety Qualifications

- Current certification in
    - Standard first aid and CPR
    - WHMIS
    - Transportation of Dangerous Goods
    - Construction Safety Training System
- Winner of ABC Electrical Contractors' Safety Award for no missed time due to work injuries, for four consecutive years (2004–2007)

Hobbies

Training for the Midsize City Mini-Triathlon

Combination resumé

A combination resumé combines elements of the chronological and functional types. It includes chronological background information as well as details about your accomplishments and the skills you've developed. It differs from a chronological resumé in that a skills or achievements section comes before the employment history.

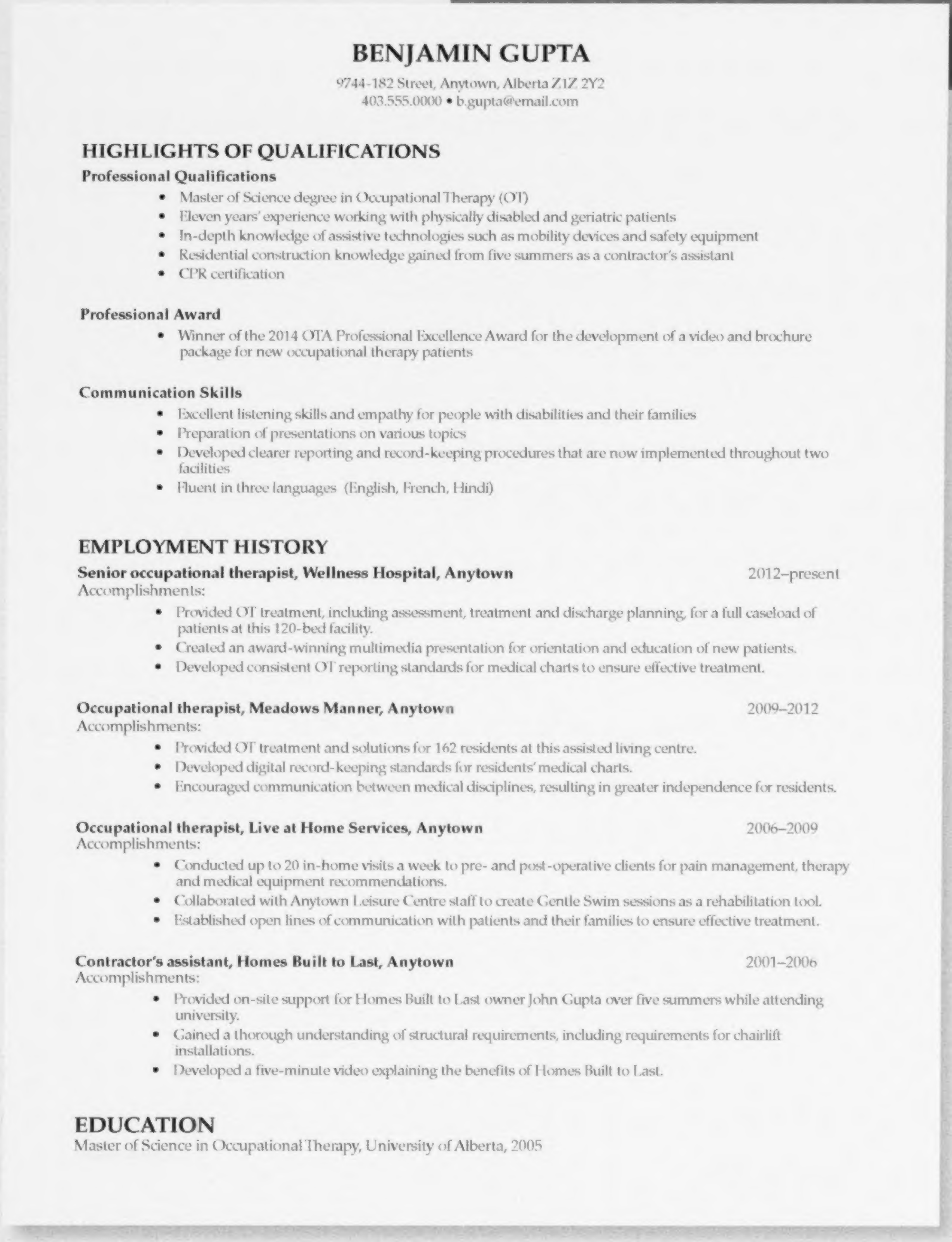
Many people find that a combination resumé is the most effective type because it allows them to highlight their most relevant qualifications and to include the employment history that most employers expect to see. However, combination resumés can be more challenging to organize and keep to a two-page length.

Combination resumés usually work well when you're changing occupations or moving into a field that's similar, but not directly related, or when you've been working for the same employer for a long time. If you've performed similar functions for a number of different organizations, a combination resumé allows you to group related experiences together.

In the following example, a job seeker who plans to change occupations uses a combination resumé to highlight how his existing experience qualifies him for a new field.

Scenario	After 11 years as an occupational therapist, Ben Gupta is tired of contract work and is looking for new challenges. He sees a Wheelchairs & More ad in the local paper for a wheelchair and chairlift sales representative with knowledge of installation techniques.
Challenges	Ben has no sales experience.
Assets (skills, accomplishments, benefits)	Ben's years of experience as an occupational therapist and his summer jobs on the construction sites of his father's home-building company are his biggest assets. Ben also feels that his communication skills, including his knowledge of three languages, are a valuable asset for a sales position. He takes the time to call the company to learn more about the position and speaks to the owner/president, who is doing the hiring.
How Ben tailors his resumé	By choosing a resumé style that combines functional and chronological aspects, Ben can play up his professional and communication skills as well as his steady work record. In his cover letters (see pages 60 and 61), he draws attention to the fact that he has already made contact with the person in charge of hiring.

Sample combination resumé. See Ben's email cover letter and print cover letter on pages 60 and 61.



BENJAMIN GUPTA

9744-182 Street, Anytown, Alberta Z1Z 2Y2
403.555.0000 • b.gupta@email.com

HIGHLIGHTS OF QUALIFICATIONS

Professional Qualifications

- Master of Science degree in Occupational Therapy (OT)
- Eleven years' experience working with physically disabled and geriatric patients
- In-depth knowledge of assistive technologies such as mobility devices and safety equipment
- Residential construction knowledge gained from five summers as a contractor's assistant
- CPR certification

Professional Award

- Winner of the 2014 OTA Professional Excellence Award for the development of a video and brochure package for new occupational therapy patients

Communication Skills

- Excellent listening skills and empathy for people with disabilities and their families
- Preparation of presentations on various topics
- Developed clearer reporting and record-keeping procedures that are now implemented throughout two facilities
- Fluent in three languages (English, French, Hindi)

EMPLOYMENT HISTORY

Senior occupational therapist, Wellness Hospital, Anytown 2012–present

Accomplishments:

- Provided OT treatment, including assessment, treatment and discharge planning, for a full caseload of patients at this 120-bed facility.
- Created an award-winning multimedia presentation for orientation and education of new patients.
- Developed consistent OT reporting standards for medical charts to ensure effective treatment.

Occupational therapist, Meadows Manner, Anytown 2009–2012

Accomplishments:

- Provided OT treatment and solutions for 162 residents at this assisted living centre.
- Developed digital record-keeping standards for residents' medical charts.
- Encouraged communication between medical disciplines, resulting in greater independence for residents.

Occupational therapist, Live at Home Services, Anytown 2006–2009

Accomplishments:

- Conducted up to 20 in-home visits a week to pre- and post-operative clients for pain management, therapy and medical equipment recommendations.
- Collaborated with Anytown Leisure Centre staff to create Gentle Swim sessions as a rehabilitation tool.
- Established open lines of communication with patients and their families to ensure effective treatment.

Contractor's assistant, Homes Built to Last, Anytown 2001–2006

Accomplishments:

- Provided on-site support for Homes Built to Last owner John Gupta over five summers while attending university.
- Gained a thorough understanding of structural requirements, including requirements for chairlift installations.
- Developed a five-minute video explaining the benefits of Homes Built to Last.

EDUCATION

Master of Science in Occupational Therapy, University of Alberta, 2005

Curriculum vitae

A curriculum vitae (CV) is a longer, more comprehensive document than a resumé. In North America, it is often used when applying for

- graduate studies or professional programs
- academic or executive-level positions
- professional association memberships or designations

Resumé	Curriculum vitae
• no more than three pages long (two pages is ideal) • provides a summary of relevant qualifications • ordered in a way that best highlights qualifications • used in most fields of work • used to quickly screen candidates • tailored to different positions	• three to 10 pages long • provides a full record of career and qualifications with a high level of detail • ordered chronologically • highlights teaching, research, service, awards and publications • used for academic and higher-level positions • used to study credentials and biographical information • doesn't change for different positions (only the cover letter changes)

If you're applying for an academic position within North America, include the following information in your CV:

- name and contact information
- objective
- summary of qualifications
- summary of skills
- education, including degrees, specialization, post-graduate and post-doctoral studies and dissertations
- professional background, including teaching interests and experience, research interests and experience, job titles and employers
- volunteer and public service experience
- research projects, grants (including amount received) and inventions
- published works
- public presentations and appearances
- honours, awards, distinctions and achievements
- professional designations and affiliations

When you're writing a curriculum vitae, use the same care in selecting, organizing and wording your information as you would when writing a resumé. Keep these additional tips in mind:

- If your CV is more than four pages long, include an executive summary at the beginning.
- Have your CV professionally translated if English is not the language of choice where you're applying for work.

If you need more information about preparing a CV, check with the placement office of a university, college or technical institute.

Resumé best practices

Human resources and career development professionals say you have between 30 seconds and one minute to grab the attention of someone reading your resumé. Here are some recommendations for producing effective resumés:

- Analyze what the employer is looking for and tailor your resumé to meet the requirements of the job. (See the **Tailoring your resumé** section on page 34.)
- Feature your strongest qualifications in the first part of your resumé.
- If you have the required skills and knowledge but lack the specific academic credential requested, apply anyway. If you present the skills you have effectively, lack of a specific credential may not be a barrier. Lead with your relevant experience and transferable skills. List your education later.
- Avoid providing information that might be used to screen you out. For example, don't include information that you're not required to supply under human rights legislation. This includes your age, gender, race, religion, marital status and ethnic background.
- Put your employment dates in the right-hand margin unless you want to emphasize the length of time you have been employed in a particular job. Most employers prefer to see dates in the right-hand margin. Use your judgment. For example, if you stayed in one job at the same level for 10 years, employers may wonder why you never advanced. If you've had a series of short-term contract or project positions, say so. Otherwise, employers may think you're unreliable.
- Use your judgment about withholding information. For example, if you have only a high school diploma and the employer is asking for a college diploma, de-emphasize your education. Near the end of your resumé, include a statement such as "Education: High School" or "Several courses completed: Marketing, Community College."
- Focus on your accomplishments. From an employer's point of view, what you've done in the past predicts what you'll do in the future. Support or substantiate your accomplishments with numbers, percentages, dollars and so on wherever possible. The **Writing accomplishment statements** exercise on page 16 will help you find the language to describe your accomplishments effectively.
- Proofread your resumé (or have someone else proofread it) to be sure it's free of spelling and grammatical errors. Don't rely on the spellcheck tool in a word-processing program, which won't catch omitted words or errors in usage.
- Don't include your references unless the employer asks that they be included.

Special circumstances

This section describes special circumstances that may present obstacles to employment and suggests ways to address these situations when writing your resumé.

Circumstance	Strategy
You're qualified but don't have the specific degree, diploma or experience requested.	Explain how your education and experience relate to the job requirements. You may want to mention specific courses that would interest the employer. There are many certificate, diploma and degree programs available. Employers may be familiar with only some of them. Emphasizing your experience as well as your education helps in this situation, even if it's volunteer experience.
Your credentials are from another province or country.	Ask an appropriate authority—a university, professional regulatory organization or assessment agency such as the International Qualifications Assessment Service (IQAS)—to evaluate your credentials. Employers will want to know what the Canadian or provincial equivalents are. Include an official assessment with your resumé or tell employers you'll bring it to an interview. IQAS is a mail-in service only and charges a fee for reports. For more information, call 780-422-5400 (for toll-free access within Alberta, first dial 310-0000). You can find the IQAS contact information at **work.alberta.ca/iqas**. Each province and territory in Canada has different legislation and regulations governing employment in the professions and trades. For more information, visit the Certification Requirements section at **alis.alberta.ca/occinfo-certification**. For more information about credential recognition, visit **albertacanada.com/opportunity/working/education-assessment.aspx**. The publication *Working in Alberta: A Guide for Internationally Trained and Educated Immigrants* provides useful information on all aspects of the Alberta workplace, from writing resumés to rights and responsibilities. It's available at **alis.alberta.ca/publications**.
You don't have a high school diploma.	If you have an extensive employment background or a demonstrated range of skills, list this in your resumé before your education. Use a heading such as Education and Development and list workshops and seminars you've taken, followed simply by "High school." If you didn't finish high school and have no post-secondary education, you can omit any reference to formal education in your resumé. In some cases, education may not be an issue. However, since it may come up in the interview, be prepared to talk about your experience in a positive way. If you have a post-secondary credential of any kind, it's not necessary to reveal that you didn't complete high school.

Your post-secondary education is incomplete.	Without explaining your situation, you may risk losing an opportunity. Rather than describing your post-secondary education incompletely (for example, "Marketing Research, University of Anytown – 2011"), let the employer know that Marketing Research is a credit course in the University of Anytown's Business Administration diploma program by describing it that way—for example, "Marketing Research, University of Anytown – Business Administration Diploma Program – 2011 to present, to be completed by July 2016." This tells the employer that you're in the process of earning a post-secondary credential.
You've been out of the workforce for a long time.	Even though you've been out of the workforce, you may have other relevant volunteer or life experiences. Use the heading Relevant Experience and describe your volunteer responsibilities. Include organization names and dates, just as you would for paid employment. A combination or functional resumé works best in this situation. It allows you to highlight skill areas such as communication skills, teamwork skills, problem-solving skills, computer skills and so on.
Your most relevant experience isn't your most recent experience.	You can highlight your past work experience by including a one- or two-line statement near the top of your resumé. Use a heading such as Profile or Highlights and say something positive and relevant to the job. For example, "extensive customer service experience" or "strong computer systems design and consulting skills." Another approach is to list past work experience under headings such as Most Relevant Professional Background first, followed by Other Professional Background. Using a combination or functional resumé will allow you to highlight your skills rather than the dates of your employment.
You were terminated from your last job.	Ironic but true: employers are more likely to regard you as a desirable applicant if you're currently employed. If employers can tell from your resumé that you're not employed, they'll wonder why. Of course, there are many reasons why you may not be working that have nothing to do with your capabilities. These may include company mergers, temporary positions, project-based employment, downsizing, business failure and so on. If you provide employment dates, think carefully about how to let the employer know about your circumstances: • If you were working in a contract or temporary position, add an explanation such as "temporary project position—completed." • For other situations, you may want to add a short explanation in your cover letter—"company went out of business" or "downsizing resulted in 33 layoffs"—or leave your explanation for the interview.

You were terminated from your last job. (continued)	- If you were fired as a result of your performance or a conflict, don't include this information in your resumé. Prepare an explanation for the interview. Talk to a career and employment counsellor or read books and Internet articles about preparing for job interviews to find a positive way to speak about your experience. (See the **Anticipating employers' concerns** section on page 73 for more suggestions.)
You feel that you may face discrimination on the basis of your gender, age, race, religion or other characteristics.	Human rights legislation protects you from having to reveal your age, gender, marital status, number of dependants, religion, nationality or ethnic background. You don't have to supply this information unless you feel it will enhance your competitiveness. There are other types of discrimination (protected grounds) that you are not obligated to reveal. For this list and additional information, visit **albertahumanrights.ab.ca**. If you are concerned that the position you are applying for is typically held by the opposite gender, you may want to use only your first initials and surname. On the other hand, if you know the employer is looking to bring people of your gender into a non-traditional work environment, it may be to your benefit to use your first name. Likewise, you don't have to reveal your age if you feel it is a potential barrier. If your high school or university graduation year reveals your age, don't supply the date. You also don't have to include your early years of employment. If an organization is trying to diversify its workforce, you may choose to let the employer know if you're an Aboriginal person, a member of a cultural minority or a person with a disability. Reveal this information subtly in your cover letter. For example, "In addition to meeting your requirement for considerable customer service experience, I have an undergraduate degree in economics earned in my native country, Nigeria." If you're looking for work in Canada for the first time, discuss your situation with someone you respect who understands Canadian employers' expectations. For example, a new Canadian might, because of language differences, reveal spelling or grammar deficiencies in a resumé or cover letter. Guard against this possibility by asking for feedback. If you are a job seeker with a disability, see the ALIS Tip *Finding Work Opportunities as a Person With a Disability* at **alis.alberta.ca/tips**.

Exercise Resumé checklist

This exercise summarizes many of the resumé dos and don'ts discussed throughout this section. Use the checklist to critique your own resumé or provide it as a guide for anyone who may be reviewing your resumé. Make any necessary changes and corrections.

Overall appearance

○ Does the resumé look professional?

○ Was the resumé created using a standard word-processing font such as Arial, Helvetica, Times New Roman, or Courier? Is the font size appropriate (10 to 12 points)?

○ Is your contact information written clearly at the top of the first page?

○ Do your name, your phone number and the page number appear on subsequent pages?

○ Does the resumé have a good balance of print and white space? Does it have even margins?

○ Is the layout appealing, uncluttered and easy to read?

○ Is the resumé free of errors in grammar or spelling?

Length and conciseness

○ Is the length appropriate (no more than three pages, ideally two pages)?

○ Can any words be cut?

Relevance

○ Are the qualifications most relevant to the job objective highlighted?

○ If personal information is included, is it relevant to the position?

Qualifications and accomplishments

○ Does the resumé emphasize the qualifications the employer is looking for?

○ Are achievements, awards, recognitions and scope of responsibilities included and described clearly?

○ Are specific examples provided to demonstrate qualifications and accomplishments?

○ Do accomplishment statements include quantifiers and qualifiers?

○ Do descriptions of skills, accomplishments and responsibilities begin with action words?

○ Are appropriate keywords used?

Clarity

○ Are appropriate headings used?

○ Do headings organize and highlight information clearly and consistently?

○ Are abbreviations that aren't keywords or terms commonly used in the industry spelled out?

Completeness

○ Does the resumé include all your important information and details?

Formatting your resumé

There are a variety of ways in which employers want and expect resumés to be submitted, including

- by email
- uploaded through an online application
- by fax
- in hard copy, sent by mail or hand delivered

Although you'll still need a paper resumé to hand to people you meet and to present at an interview, you're far more likely to submit your resumé by email than by mail.

Many employers prefer to receive an electronic version of your resumé so that it can be

- circulated and stored electronically
- uploaded into recruiting or applicant tracking software
- reformatted from an online application

To determine what resumé format to submit, read the job ad or posting carefully. It's very important to follow the employer's formatting requirements as closely as possible. If you send an email attachment using incompatible word-processing software, for example, your resumé will likely be screened out. At the very least, the employer will question your attention to detail.

Formatting best practices

If you are submitting your resumé by email or in print, follow these formatting guidelines:

- Use a standard word-processing font such as Arial, Helvetica, Times New Roman, or Courier in a size between 10 and 12 points.
- Keep your resumé to three pages or less. The ideal length is two pages. Although some resumé-writing publications may recommend one page, most Canadian employers want more detail than that. If you're applying for a managerial or professional position or preparing a curriculum vitae, three or more pages may be appropriate.
- Leave as much white (blank) space as you can while keeping the length to about two pages. Balance top, bottom and side margin width.
- Use bulleted lists that allow employers to read your resumé quickly.
- Align headings (for example, skill titles, work titles) along the left side of the page.
- Put your name and phone number on each page of the resumé and number the pages.
- Don't title your resumé with the word *Resumé*.

Paper resumés

When you are preparing a paper resumé, keep the following in mind:

Do	Don't
• Use good-quality 8.5-inch x 11-inch white or slightly off-white paper. Elements such as paper texture or colours and graphics will make your resumé difficult to scan or reproduce accurately. • Be sure that copies of your resumé are clean, bright, straight and stain-free. • Use a paper clip rather than a staple to hold the pages together. • Always mail or deliver your resumé in a 9-inch x 12-inch envelope.	• Sign your resumé. • Handwrite your resumé. • Bind your resumé or use a special folder. • Fold your resumé.

Emailing your résumé

A Microsoft Word document is usually the standard for sending a resumé as an attached document. That said, before sending your resumé as an attachment, check what file type the employer prefers. There are three possibilities:

1. **DOC** file, the typical file format for Microsoft Word documents. If you send the resume as a **DOCX** file, generated by Word 2007 or later, people using earlier versions of Word may not be able to open it.
2. **RTF,** or rich text format. This file format maintains formatting such as tabs, fonts and margins in documents created on and transferred between different operating systems and software programs.
3. **PDF**, or portable document format. This file format is as close to paper as online formats can get. The document appears onscreen exactly as you created it, and the format can't be altered.

If the employer does not specify a preference, use the DOC format. Applicant tracking systems used by employers can process files in this format, but most of these systems can't search PDFs. Many job search websites will also let you upload your resumé as a Microsoft Word document. The sample resumés on pages 43, 45 and 47 are all examples of well-designed Microsoft Word documents.

Some employers ask that you send both your resumé and your cover letter in a single document as a single email attachment. In this case, your cover letter will be the first page.

Online application forms

Online application forms often resemble paper application forms. Many job search websites provide these forms for you to use as a way of posting your resumé. At some employer websites, you're required to fill out this kind of form to apply for a position. Other employers (and increasingly,

job search websites) offer you the option of uploading your resumé.

Given the choice, it's usually best to upload your resumé rather than to copy and paste it into an online application form:

- Online forms ask you to present your qualifications in the way the employer or job search website dictates, not necessarily in the way that markets you most effectively.
- Online forms typically do not allow for formatting such as horizontal lines and white space in margins.
- The amount of text you can insert may be limited. For example, a form may allow only 600 characters (not words, but letters and spaces) for you to describe your technical skills.
- Online forms do not provide editing tools like spellcheck. Also, it's less convenient for someone to proofread your information in an online form than to proofread your resumé.

If you must use an online form, an effective way to do so is to copy and paste the information into the form from a plain text version of your resumé. (See the **Plain text resumés** section on next page.) This approach allows you to maintain some control over how your information is presented in the online form. Look at the pasted text carefully: you may have to make some adjustments, especially if the space available in the field is limited.

Some online application forms won't allow you to copy and paste from your resumé. In this case, you must type your qualifications directly into the form. Approach this task carefully and take your time. Keep your resumé handy so that you can refer to it. If possible, have someone else proofread the form before you submit it.

Other application forms

When you're required to complete an application form, ask whether it would be acceptable to attach your resumé and fill in only your name, contact information, the position applied for and the competition number on the form itself.

Some employers may want you to complete the entire application form and will reject your application if you don't. In this case, complete each section of the form in full. If you feel that a question violates human rights, you may decide to

- leave the question blank
- put a question mark after the offending question
- write something like "will provide at time of hiring"

For example, an employer requires information relating to your marital status, number of dependants and age **only if you're hired**—in order to administer income tax deductions and benefits. It's inappropriate for an employer to ask for this information on an application form.

If you're applying for entry-level positions that require some post-secondary education, employers may ask for a completed CACEE Application for Employment Form, a generic application form developed by the Canadian Association of Career Educators and Employers. You can find this form on the CACEE website at **cacee.com**.

Alternative resumé formats

Advances in digital technology have opened up several possibilities for creating resumés in alternative formats, including

- resumés included as pages on a personal website
- infographic resumés, which you can create using free tools available online
- YouTube video resumés, in which job seekers introduce themselves on camera

Many Alberta employers and human resources professionals tend to regard these formats as cutting edge, particularly outside of creative occupations such as web design, graphic design, communications and marketing, broadcasting and so on. However, presenting your resumé in an alternative format in some occupational areas means taking the risk of being labelled too innovative or not a good fit for the organization.

Generally speaking, alternative formats are most effective when you use them as part of your portfolio rather than your initial resumé submission. After your standard resumé has generated interest and an interview, an employer is much more likely to take the trouble to visit your website.

If you feel that an alternative format resumé would be the best choice for a job you're interested in, discuss this possibility first with someone who knows the industry well. A word of caution: think carefully before you include photographs or footage of yourself in an alternative format resumé unless your image is an important consideration (for example, in television broadcasting). Because of human rights concerns, employers prefer to assess your qualifications without reference to gender, age, race and so on. However, including images of yourself in your portfolio is acceptable because you typically present your portfolio at the time of an interview.

Plain text resumés

Plain text is sometimes referred to as ASCII (American Standard Code for Information Interchange), which is the code used in standard email. ASCII is so basic it can be read by virtually every operating system.

It is less and less common to need a plain text resumé because most online systems accept resumés in Word format. However, if an employer requests that you submit your resumé in the body of an email or by pasting it into an online application form or database, you will need to format the resumé as plain text.

Use these suggestions to create a plain text version of your resumé from a Word (DOC) file:

- Use standard fonts, such as Courier, Times, Helvetica or Arial.
- Don't use graphics, shading, tabs or columns.
- Use all caps for major headings. Avoid bold, italics or underlining.
- Change bullets to asterisks.
- Align text left.
- If you're including your plain text resumé in the body of an email, remember to remove your name, telephone number and page number at the top of the second page and adjust the space accordingly.

To see an example of a resumé in plain text format, visit **alis.alberta.ca/worksearch/resumes**.

Writing cover letters

You should always send a cover letter (or cover email) along with your resumé. The cover letter is an important marketing tool. Think of your resumé as a movie and your cover letter as the trailer that makes people want to see it.

In your cover letter or email, you want to show the employer that you're

- qualified for the position
- confident about your abilities
- excited about the prospect of working for the organization
- outstanding among the other candidates

You want to give the employer one or two compelling reasons to read your resumé and then call you in for an interview. A cover letter or email offers you the opportunity to write persuasively about your qualifications and what you can offer.

What to put in your cover letter

In your cover letter or email

- quote the competition number and title and tell how you learned about the position, if applicable
- use keywords and action words but, where possible, not the same ones that you use in your resumé
- highlight your relevant qualifications
- include information that lets the employer know you've researched the company and the position
- stress what you can contribute to the organization

When applying by email, follow these additional suggestions:

- If the employer expects to receive your resumé and cover letter in a single attachment, format the document so that the cover letter is the first page.
- If the employer doesn't ask for a cover letter but requires your resumé as an attachment, consider the email to which the resumé is attached to be your cover letter. The sample cover letters in this section illustrate how an email cover letter differs from a print cover letter or a cover letter sent as an attachment.

Employers do not expect you to sign a cover letter sent as an attachment or as an email. Typing your name is sufficient. If you've digitized your signature, feel free to use it.

Cover letter best practices

- Keep it short, simple and specific (no more than three paragraphs and no more than one page or one screen in length).
- Send your cover letter or email and resumé to a specific person—the hiring manager, a human resources employee or the business owner, for example. Phone or email the organization to find out who that person would be for the position you're interested in.
- Write the way you speak. Avoid stuffy, formal words and phrases such as "Enclosed please find." Instead, say something like "I'm keenly interested in _______ and believe I have the qualifications you are looking for."
- Limit the number of sentences beginning with "I."
- Be original and show enthusiasm.
- Make sure your letter contains no spelling mistakes or errors in grammar.
- If providing a hard copy, use good-quality paper.

Cover letter template

Your Address
City, Province
Postal Code

Date

Employer's name
Employer's position or title
Organization name
City, Province
Postal Code

Dear [Employer's name]:

Re: Competition number and title, if applicable

Opening Paragraph
State your purpose for writing. Tell how you learned about the job and why you're applying. What is it about the job or organization that interests you?

Middle Paragraph
Emphasize specific knowledge and skills that make you a strong candidate for the job. Don't repeat the information that's in your resumé word for word. For example, "I have a communications diploma and three years of experience." Summarize instead: "Throughout my seven years of related experience, I have strengthened my skills as a communications specialist." Then emphasize particular strengths you have to offer that are relevant to the job. For example, "Your description of the 'ideal' candidate highlighted enthusiasm and strong interpersonal communication skills. My strengths in these areas have been highly valued in my previous and current positions, where I have frequently been commended for how effectively I have handled difficult customer situations." Don't emphasize how the opportunity will benefit you, even if it will. Think like an employer: make it clear how you can benefit the organization.

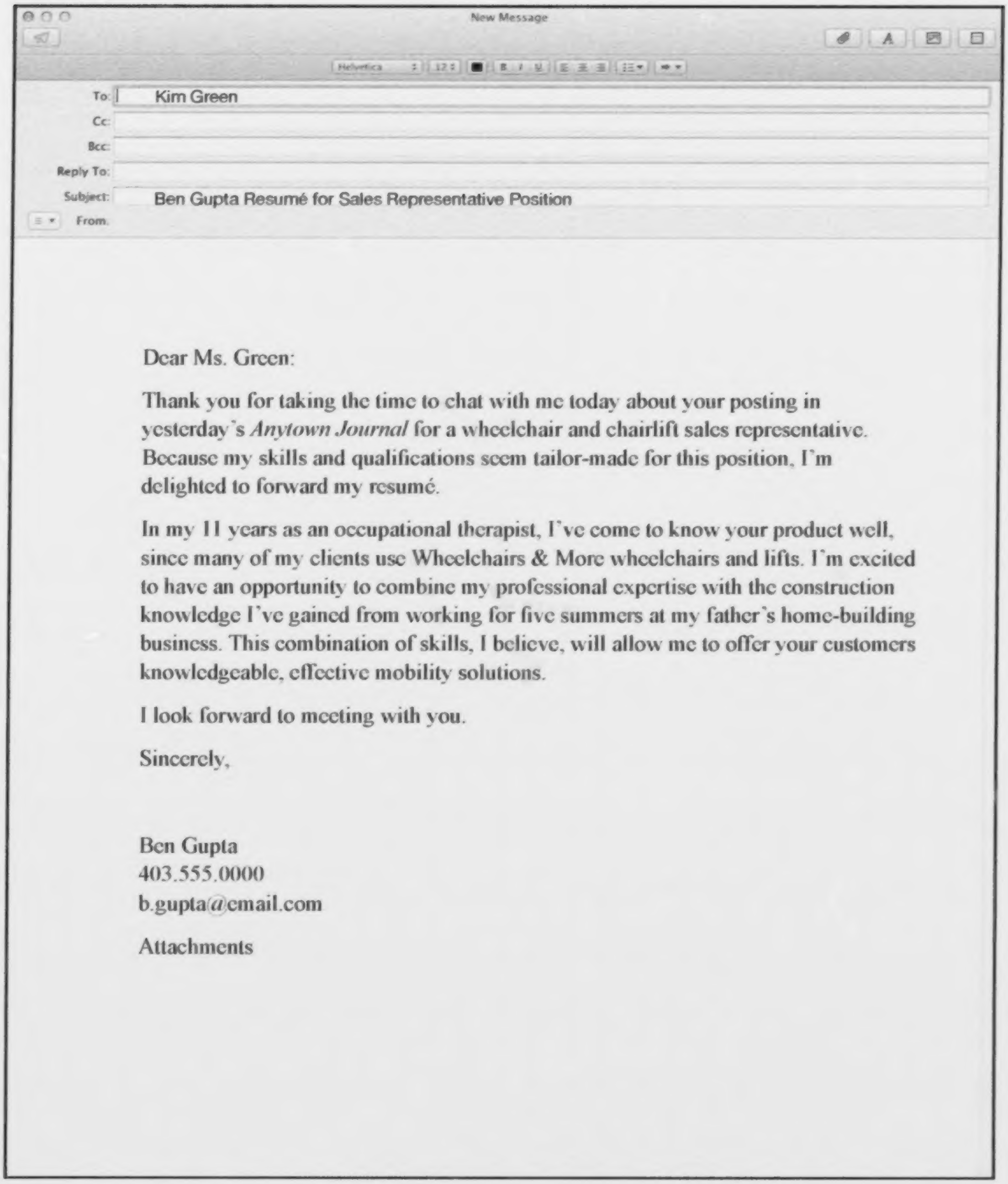
Closing Paragraph
Describe in assertive, positive language what you expect will happen or what you plan to do next. If you're responding to an ad, include a statement such as "I look forward to meeting you to discuss what I can offer to your organization." If you're sending an unsolicited resumé, write something like "I will contact you early in the week of June 12 to set up an appointment with you. I look forward to discussing possible employment with (name of organization)." If you feel it would be to your advantage, mention your immediate availability or your willingness to travel or relocate. Indicate that you've enclosed or attached your resumé.

Sincerely,
(printed or faxed copy signed)
Your name

Enclosure

Sample email cover letter

A resumé would be attached to the following email.



To: Kim Green

Cc:

Bcc:

Reply To:

Subject: Ben Gupta Resumé for Sales Representative Position

From:

Dear Ms. Green:

Thank you for taking the time to chat with me today about your posting in yesterday's *Anytown Journal* for a wheelchair and chairlift sales representative. Because my skills and qualifications seem tailor-made for this position, I'm delighted to forward my resumé.

In my 11 years as an occupational therapist, I've come to know your product well, since many of my clients use Wheelchairs & More wheelchairs and lifts. I'm excited to have an opportunity to combine my professional expertise with the construction knowledge I've gained from working for five summers at my father's home-building business. This combination of skills, I believe, will allow me to offer your customers knowledgeable, effective mobility solutions.

I look forward to meeting with you.

Sincerely,

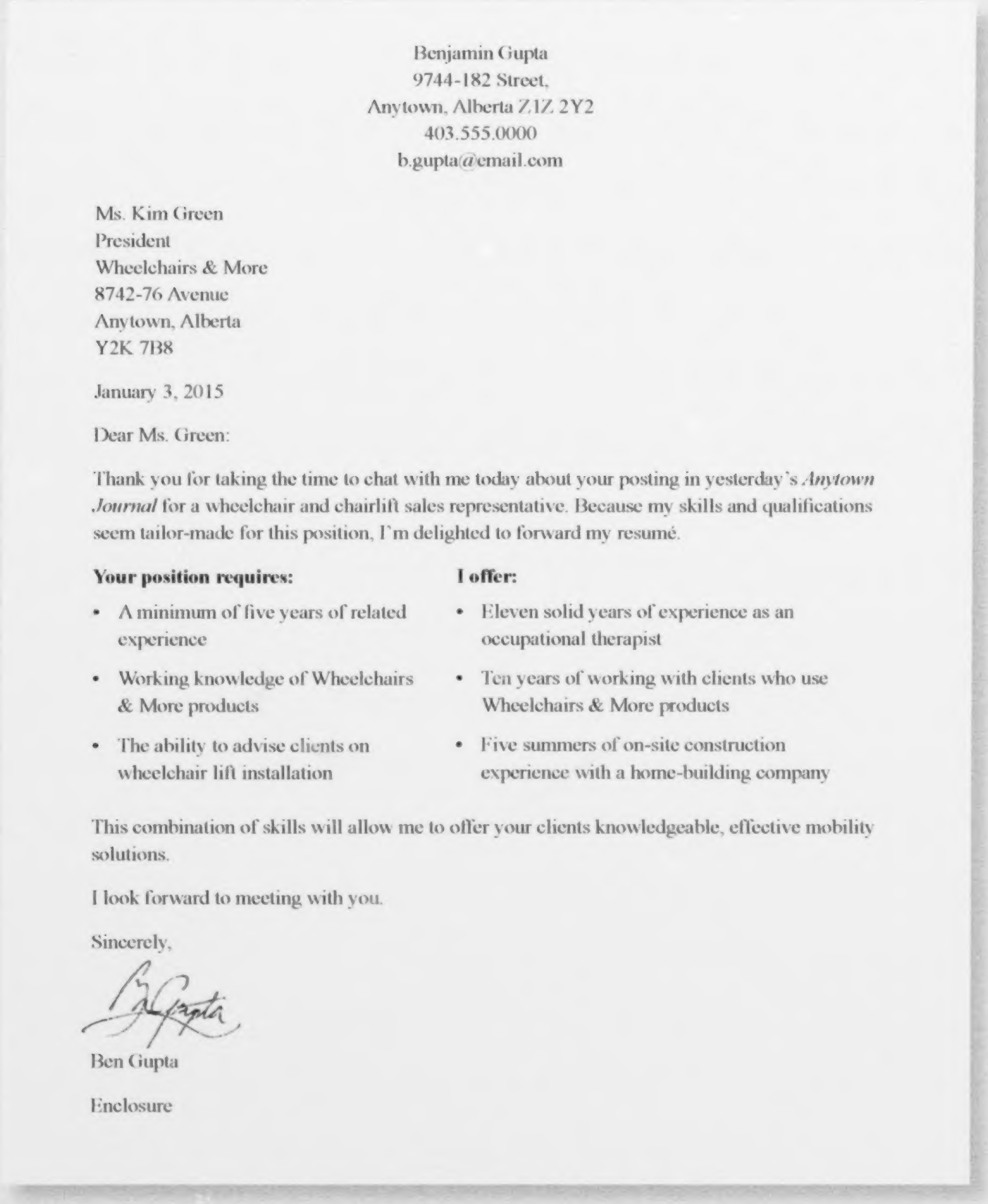
Ben Gupta
403.555.0000
b.gupta@email.com

Attachments

Sample print or attachment cover letter

The following example rewrites the previous email as a letter. Notice how the two-column format allows the applicant to directly show how his qualifications meet or exceed the requirements.

Although this cover letter can be sent in print (signed) or as an email attachment, it won't work in the body of an email because most email programs won't be able to maintain the two-column format.



Benjamin Gupta
9744-182 Street,
Anytown, Alberta Z1Z 2Y2
403.555.0000
b.gupta@email.com

Ms. Kim Green
President
Wheelchairs & More
8742-76 Avenue
Anytown, Alberta
Y2K 7B8

January 3, 2015

Dear Ms. Green:

Thank you for taking the time to chat with me today about your posting in yesterday's *Anytown Journal* for a wheelchair and chairlift sales representative. Because my skills and qualifications seem tailor-made for this position, I'm delighted to forward my resumé.

Your position requires:	**I offer:**
• A minimum of five years of related experience	• Eleven solid years of experience as an occupational therapist
• Working knowledge of Wheelchairs & More products	• Ten years of working with clients who use Wheelchairs & More products
• The ability to advise clients on wheelchair lift installation	• Five summers of on-site construction experience with a home-building company

This combination of skills will allow me to offer your clients knowledgeable, effective mobility solutions.

I look forward to meeting with you.

Sincerely,

B Gupta

Ben Gupta

Enclosure

Using other marketing tools

This section looks at other marketing tools that you can use in your work search, including

- references
- letters of inquiry
- business cards
- portfolios
- proposals
- thank-you notes

References

During an interview, many employers will ask you for a list of references—people who know you and can tell an employer about your character, skills and work experience. You will therefore need to create a list of your references, along with their contact information, and take it with you to interviews. Your references are a crucial part of your marketing strategy. They should be people who

- know you well enough to be able to answer specific questions about your character, skills and work ethic
- can recommend you to employers without reservation
- have good communication skills, especially on the phone, as most employers prefer to check references this way

You should have at least three references who have either supervised you or worked closely with you (on the job, at school or in volunteer situations). If you have limited experience, some may be personal references (people who can vouch for your character, but who haven't directly supervised or observed your work).

Take the following steps before including people on your list of references:

- Choose the most appropriate references for the job you're applying for.
- Ask permission to give their name and contact information to employers.
- Ask whether they prefer to be contacted by phone, by email or in writing.
- Ask your references whether they feel comfortable providing a positive recommendation. Don't assume they do. To succeed in finding work, you need references who sincerely believe you're a valuable worker. If a potential reference gives you any indication that he or she wouldn't be completely comfortable recommending your work, ask someone else. If a reference sounds hesitant about answering a question, for whatever reason, employers may become suspicious.
- To ensure your references are ready to answer questions promptly and positively, give them a copy of your resumé and let them know what position(s) you will be applying for and which skills you want to emphasize.
- Contact your references each time you provide their name to a potential employer.
- Give your references the details about how and why you left or are leaving your job. The explanation you give a prospective employer must be the same as your reference's and as positive as possible.
- Give your references enough time to respond to requests from potential employers (preferably a few days to prepare for a phone call and two weeks to provide a reference letter).

Because of potential legal issues, many organizations have developed guidelines for providing references. Some will provide only employment dates, position and salary information. Others will include only information from a performance review that you've endorsed. If one of your references is restricted in this way, you may want to ask that person to let potential employers know this response is company policy and isn't a reflection of your performance.

Once you've identified your references, create a list including each reference's

- name
- position and organization
- phone number
- email address
- relationship to you (for example, immediate supervisor or client)
- contact preferences (time or method), if applicable

RESOURCE

Requesting references

For more information on references, see the ALIS Tips *Requesting a Reference: Who and How to Ask* and *Unavailable or Problem References? What You Can Do*, available at **alis.alberta.ca/tips.**

Don't include your references on your resumé. Most employers don't expect or want to contact your references until they've interviewed and even shortlisted you. And including your references on resumés you post online may compromise your references' privacy. Bring your list of references to the interview.

Remember to thank your references each time you use their names, whether or not you land the job.

Letters of reference

Letters of reference are typewritten or emailed business letters in which your references tell potential employers about you. Although most employers prefer to contact your references by phone, a letter may be the best way to get a recommendation if your reference is moving or is about to retire.

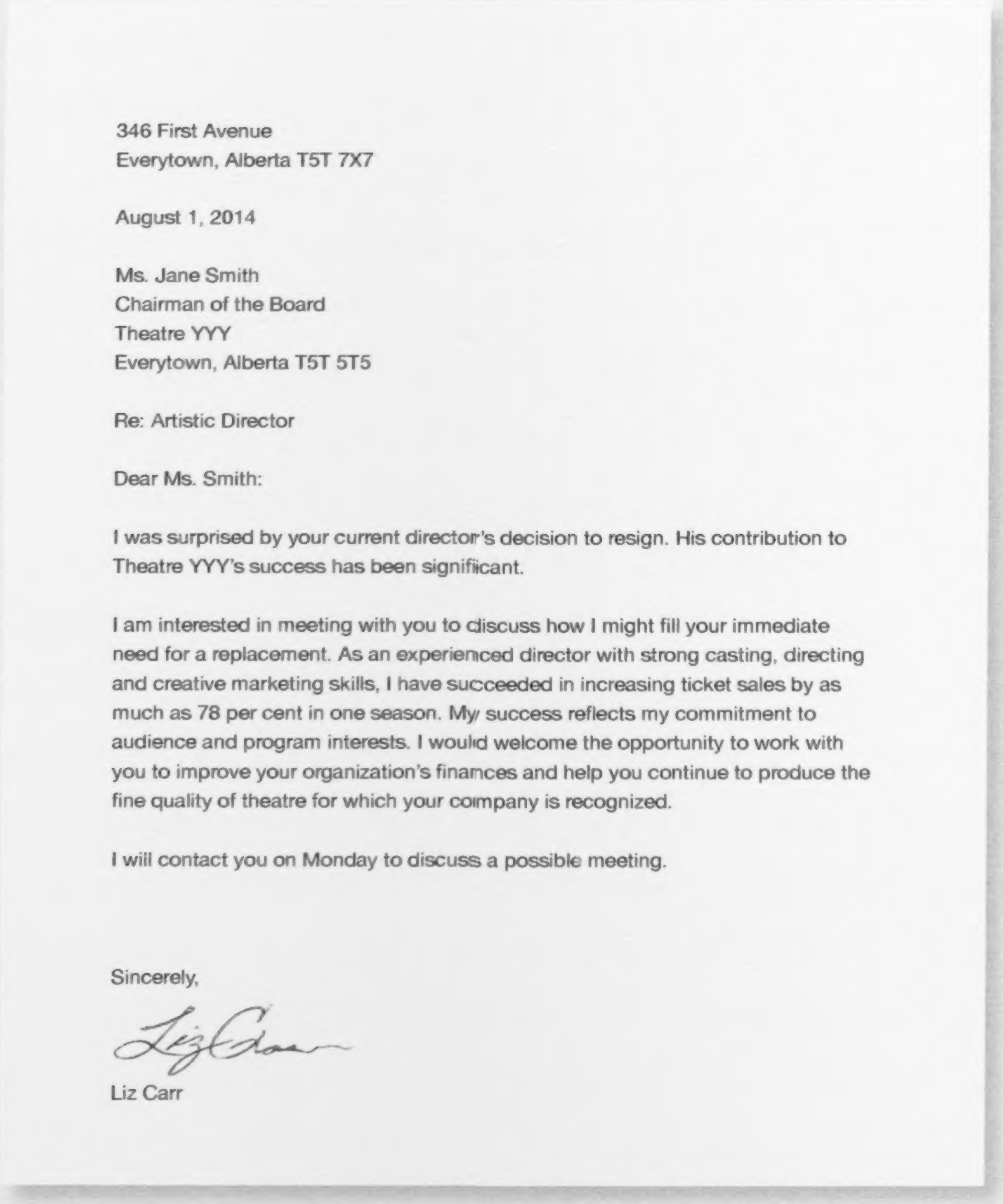
Letters of inquiry

Writing a letter of inquiry is a great way to break into the hidden job market. If you'd like to work for a particular company, don't wait for it to advertise an opening and then have to compete with many other candidates for the position. Instead, create your own opportunity or job lead by contacting the company and letting it know of your interest and what you have to offer.

Address your letter or email to the person in charge of hiring. Introduce yourself and explain why it would be mutually beneficial for you to meet. If you send an email, create a subject line that's intriguing and will ensure that your message will not be mistaken for junk mail.

The more you know about the company, the better you'll be able to identify any current or potential need and match your specific skills and background to meet it.

The following letter of inquiry was written to explore a possible opportunity after the job seeker read a news article.



346 First Avenue
Everytown, Alberta T5T 7X7

August 1, 2014

Ms. Jane Smith
Chairman of the Board
Theatre YYY
Everytown, Alberta T5T 5T5

Re: Artistic Director

Dear Ms. Smith:

I was surprised by your current director's decision to resign. His contribution to Theatre YYY's success has been significant.

I am interested in meeting with you to discuss how I might fill your immediate need for a replacement. As an experienced director with strong casting, directing and creative marketing skills, I have succeeded in increasing ticket sales by as much as 78 per cent in one season. My success reflects my commitment to audience and program interests. I would welcome the opportunity to work with you to improve your organization's finances and help you continue to produce the fine quality of theatre for which your company is recognized.

I will contact you on Monday to discuss a possible meeting.

Sincerely,

Liz Carr

Business cards

Handing out business cards is a professional way of ensuring that people can contact you if they hear about an opportunity you might be interested in. Business cards help people remember you and the context in which they met you. They are a useful tool for expanding your network because your contacts can also pass your cards on to others.

Include the following information on your business card:

- your name, followed by a professional designation, college diploma or university degree, if you have one
- your field of work (for example, Mechanical Engineer, Health Care Professional, Adult Educator, Administrative Assistant, Musician, Sales Representative)
- your contact information (telephone number, fax number, cellphone number and email address)
- your company name, if you have your own company
- up to three points that describe your work, skills and characteristics

You can also use the space on the back of your card to market yourself by briefly listing your skills and accomplishments. Another option is to include a QR code (a square barcode that can be scanned by smartphones) that contains your contact information or a link to your website.

Portfolios

An employment portfolio is a collection of items that provide concrete evidence of your skills and accomplishments. It can be

- a collection of material assembled in a binder or an artist's portfolio
- a digital or online collection of documents and files
- a website

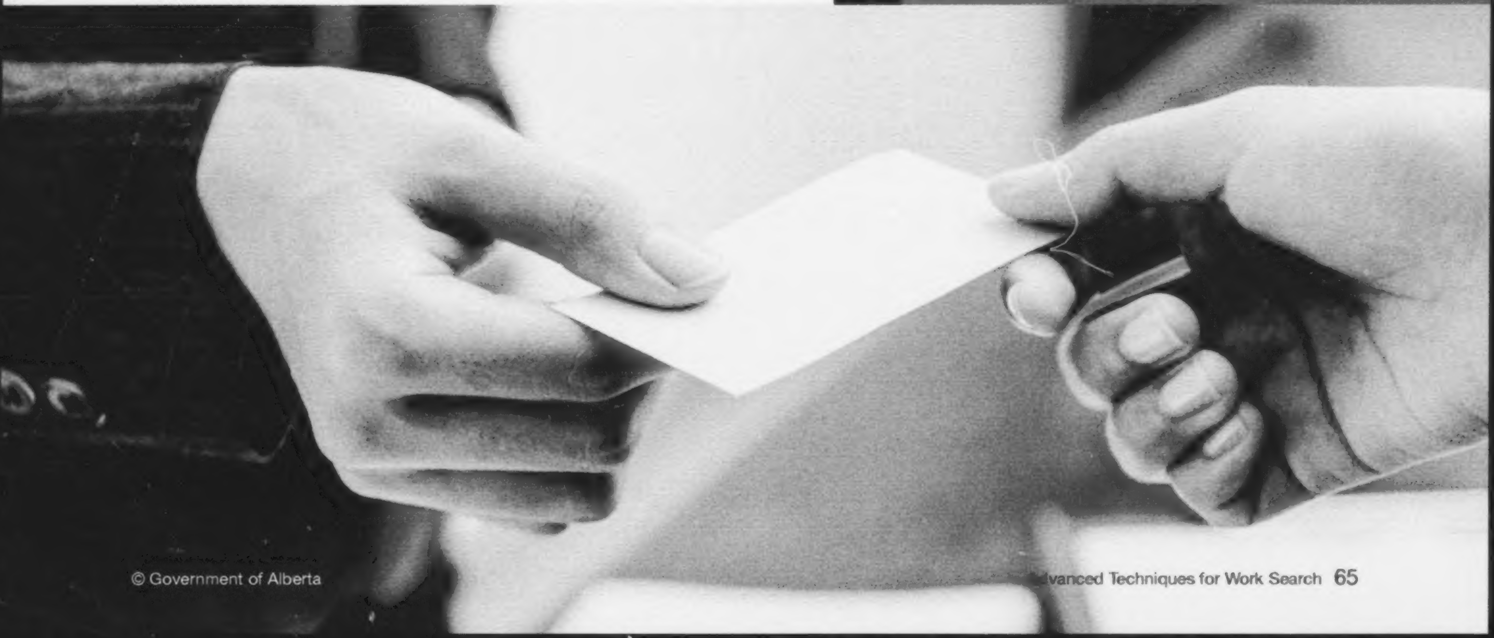
You can show your portfolio in an interview or, if your portfolio is online, include the link on your resumé or business card.

Currently in Alberta, presenting a portfolio in an interview is still relatively uncommon outside of creative fields such as communications or graphic design. However, with the encouragement of career development professionals, educators and some certification associations, portfolios are becoming increasingly common within other professional groups. In fact, high school students in Alberta are now required to create their own career portfolios.

RESOURCE

Want to learn more about portfolios?

For more information about portfolios, see the ALIS Tips *Portfolios: Document Your Accomplishments* and *Portfolios: Showcase Your Accomplishments*, available at **alis.alberta.ca/tips**.



TIP

Tools for online portfolios

If you want to create a website to host your portfolio but don't know how to do your own coding, a number of online services, which are available free of charge, allow you to create a website. Another option, if you want to showcase creative work online without creating your own website, is to set up a profile on a portfolio site. You can access these tools by doing a simple search online.

Proposals

You may meet or hear about an employer who's struggling with a problem that you're uniquely qualified to solve. If so, you may be able to create a work opportunity for yourself by submitting an unsolicited proposal.

Your proposal could take the form of a concise letter that includes the following information:

- background information such as a reference to previous discussions with the employer
- a short description of the challenge the employer faces and the desired outcomes
- some brief suggestions for a course of action
- your special qualifications (skills, experience) for the action you propose
- when you could begin and complete the project
- the fees and expenses you would charge
- when you'll contact the employer to follow up

Be careful not to provide all the details of your proposed course of action. The employer could take your ideas and ask an employee or someone else to implement them.

An unsolicited proposal is less likely to be accepted than a solicited one. However, if you've discussed the situation with people from the organization and are sure they'd be receptive to a proposal, you may decide that the potential benefit is worth investing some of your time and energy.

If possible, deliver a printed proposal in person or by mail or courier. An emailed proposal may look less attractive. Enclose your business card and, if you have one, a brochure about your business.

Thank-you notes

Thank-you notes are a good way to let people know you appreciate their help or consideration. Thank people who

- spend time providing information or suggestions related to your job search
- give you job leads
- invite you to come in for an interview
- agree to be a reference or provide a letter of reference
- turn you down for a job

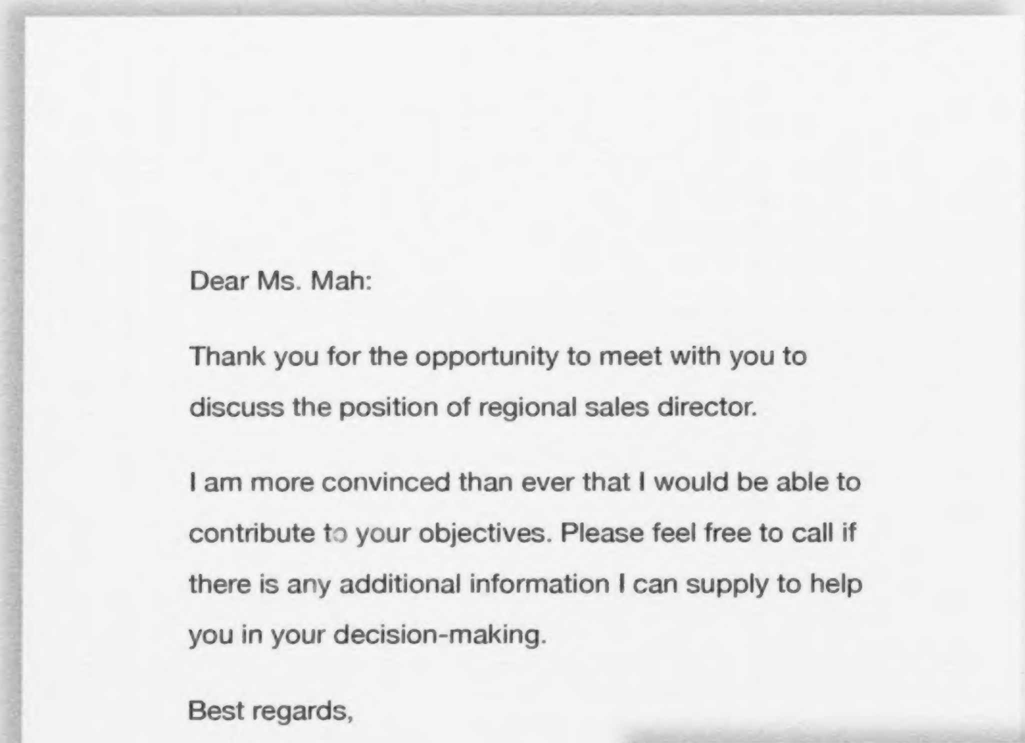
If your correspondence is with someone who has helped you by email, then an email is also an appropriate way in which to thank that person. You may also send your note on personal stationery or a small card.

When you're advised that you aren't the successful candidate in a job competition, write a thank-you note that politely and briefly expresses your disappointment, reinforces your continued interest in the company and thanks the interviewer(s) for the opportunity to discuss your background.

RESOURCE

Learn more about proposals

For more information on proposals, see the ALIS Tip *Writing a Proposal*, available at **alis.alberta.ca/tips**.



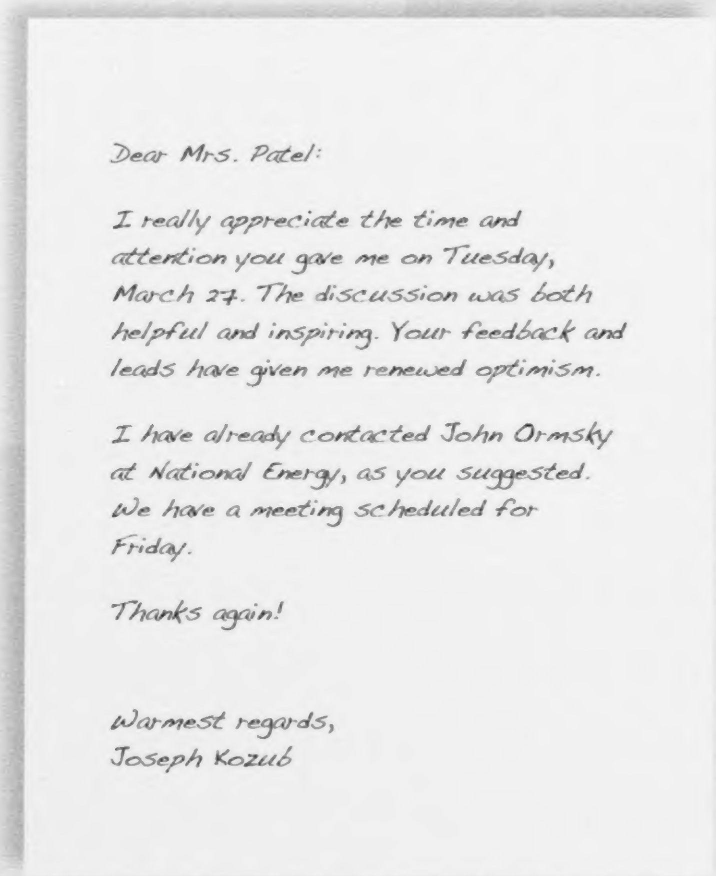
Dear Ms. Mah:

Thank you for the opportunity to meet with you to discuss the position of regional sales director.

I am more convinced than ever that I would be able to contribute to your objectives. Please feel free to call if there is any additional information I can supply to help you in your decision-making.

Best regards,
Frank G. Svenson

An example of an email to be sent after a job interview.



Dear Mrs. Patel:

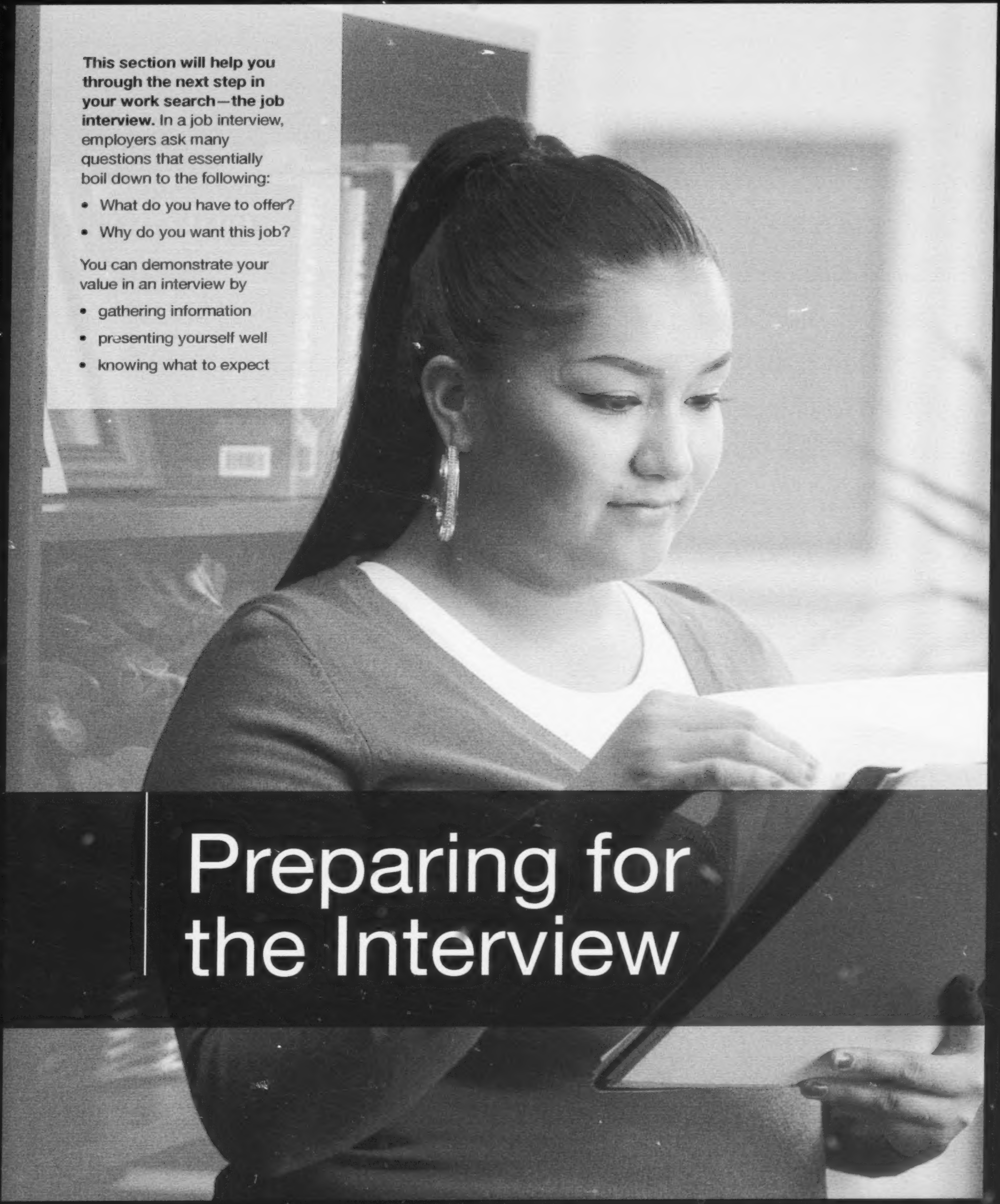
I really appreciate the time and attention you gave me on Tuesday, March 27. The discussion was both helpful and inspiring. Your feedback and leads have given me renewed optimism.

I have already contacted John Ormsky at National Energy, as you suggested. We have a meeting scheduled for Friday.

Thanks again!

Warmest regards,
Joseph Kozub

An example of an appropriate thank-you note after an information interview.



This section will help you through the next step in your work search—the job interview. In a job interview, employers ask many questions that essentially boil down to the following:

- What do you have to offer?
- Why do you want this job?

You can demonstrate your value in an interview by

- gathering information
- presenting yourself well
- knowing what to expect

Preparing for the Interview

Gathering information

Studies confirm that applicants who take the time to find out something about the employer are more likely to get the job. The more you know about an organization, the more confident you'll feel going into an interview because you'll be sure that you're a good fit for the position. You'll be able to answer the employer's questions professionally and thoroughly.

The following list reviews some of the suggestions from the section **Researching employers**, which begins on page 22:

- Visit and explore the employer's website. Use an Internet search engine to find other information about the organization.
- Larger organizations often have public affairs or communications departments that distribute information about the organization's programs, services, financial situation and contributions to the community. This information is often available online.
- Visit the organization. Check out the location and the products and services. Talk with the receptionist or speak with another employee who may be willing to answer questions. Noticing how people are dressed will help you decide what to wear to your interview.
- Check out the feel of an organization by becoming a customer yourself. Are the staff helpful? Do they smile and interact, or keep their heads down and their doors closed?
- Human resources staff at an organization can be a valuable source of information about job descriptions, salary ranges and the organization's philosophy, goals and values.
- Talk to the staff at your local public library or Alberta Works Centre. Explain that you're preparing for an interview and would like as much recent information about an organization as possible. Staff may be able to direct you to both online and print resources such as the organization's annual report or other sources of information (for example, magazine or news articles). To find the nearest Alberta Works Centre, visit **alis.alberta.ca/awc** or call the Alberta Career Information Hotline. See the **Resources** section (page 95) for contact information.
- Ask the people in your network what they know about the organization.
- Set up an information interview with someone who works for the organization.
- Contact your local chamber of commerce for information about the organization.

TIP

Research shows initiative

An interviewer may ask what you've done to prepare for the interview, knowing that your answer reveals your

- interest in the position
- motivation
- resourcefulness
- planning and research skills
- communication skills

Doing your research will help you answer this question with the kind of detail and commitment that will make you stand out. It will also help you handle many other questions that will be asked in the interview.

Presenting yourself well

Your skills and accomplishments are key aspects you'll be focusing on during an interview. However, how you present yourself—your appearance, your attitude, your body language and so on—is also vitally important. Research indicates that the decision to reject an applicant is made within the first three minutes of the interview. So you want to do everything you can to create a good first impression!

To present yourself in the best possible light during an interview, think about how to

- build your confidence
- project a professional image
- anticipate employers' concerns

Building your confidence

Showing confidence in an interview will help you create the kind of impression that lands jobs. To build your confidence and increase your sense of empowerment before an interview, develop a clear idea of what you want to say about yourself and what you want to learn about the company and the position.

To help you plan what you want to say, consider the following questions:

- What relevant knowledge, skills and abilities do I have to offer?
- How do my education and experience relate to the employer's needs?
- How well do the demands of the job and the nature of the organization meet my needs and wants?
- What's my track record for achieving results, contributing to successful outcomes and enhancing group effectiveness?

Writing out your answers to these questions and practising them out loud will significantly increase your potential for success. You'll be clear about your purpose and more confident as a result.

Use the following tips to help you manage any anxiety you have:

- Visualize yourself in the interview. Form a mental picture of who is in the room. See yourself looking poised, confident and relaxed and responding to questions with ease. Observe the positive reaction of the interviewers. This will help to reduce fear of the unknown and minimize negative thoughts and expectations.
- Just before going into an interview, breathe deeply and slowly to slow your heart rate and calm yourself so that you can concentrate on what you want to say. While you're waiting to be called into the interview, sit up straight with your feet flat on the floor and your head erect. Take a deep breath and very slowly exhale through your mouth. Repeat three or more times.
- While deep breathing or immediately after, use positive affirmations like the following to maintain a positive, upbeat attitude:
  - I'm relaxed and confident.
  - I can handle anything that comes up in the interview.
  - I'm a good communicator.
  - I'm an ideal candidate for the job.
  - I have a great deal to offer this company.
  - I'm prepared.
  - I will learn from this process.
- Review and reaffirm several specific strengths you bring to the job.

Projecting a professional image

Before you even speak, the image you project (your clothing, grooming, posture, facial expression, eye contact and handshake) creates an impact. Your visual presentation is responsible for more than half of the impression you make.

What to wear

When you're researching an employer, find out how people in the organization usually dress. Consider dropping by the company to get a feel for how employees are dressed, or ask the person who calls to schedule the interview. As a general rule, aim to dress like the employees, but one level higher.

Every workplace has a slightly different set of rules for appropriate attire. For example, a shirt and tie with slacks and a co-ordinated sports jacket may be very appropriate for a man in one organization, but not in a more formal, image-conscious company where staff members are expected to wear suits. On the other hand, if you're applying for a service management position in an oilfield company, wearing a three-piece suit may be inappropriate.

The style, colour and fabric of your clothing will affect the impression you make. Be conservative. For a job interview, solid colours tend to be better than busy, bold prints. Make sure the clothes you wear are clean, pressed and in good condition and that your shoes are polished and in good repair. Use discretion with perfume (many companies now have a scent-free policy), jewellery, makeup and other accessories.

Being neat and well-groomed is important. If you're in doubt about the professionalism of your appearance, ask trusted friends, colleagues or mentors for feedback and advice. By carefully choosing what you wear, you'll be saying to the employer, "I understand your culture. I belong. I fit in."

Body language

Once you have the right look, make sure your body language supports a professional image too. Non-verbal communication speaks louder than words.

As part of your preparation, pay attention to other people's body language. When you're watching people, take note of mannerisms that communicate what you'd like to say about yourself. Anticipate how an interviewer might interpret your mannerisms and ensure that your body is saying what you want to communicate. Try the following suggestions:

- Keep your head, shoulders and back erect. Walk with a sense of purpose to communicate energy and confidence. If you don't actually feel confident, pretending you do will have a positive influence on your body language.
- In the interview, sit up straight with your feet flat on the floor and your hands in your lap or your arms on the chair arms. This is an open position. It says that you're relaxed, confident and comfortable. If your hands or arms are crossed over your chest or stomach, you may be seen as defensive, hostile or closed-minded.

TIP

Shake hands with confidence

- Take the initiative and extend your hand without waiting for the interviewer to do so.
- Say "Hello" or "Pleased to meet you."
- If you're being introduced to a third party by someone who states your full name, you don't need to repeat it. If your name is not given, add "I'm (your full name)" to your greeting.
- Firmly grip the full hand (not just the fingers) of the person you're greeting. Two shakes of the hand is standard.

- Show friendliness, interest and confidence in your facial expression. Smile and make direct eye contact. In Canada, lack of eye contact is often interpreted as lack of honesty or lack of confidence.
- Learn how to shake hands if this skill isn't already a part of your social behaviour. A professional, friendly handshake shows confidence, breaks down barriers and initiates bonding.

- Lean forward slightly to show interest.
- Use appropriate hand and arm gestures to add emphasis and credibility to what you're saying. But avoid overdoing your gestures.
- If you have a tendency to wiggle, fidget or play with anything you have in your hands, be aware and stop yourself. Practise and get feedback from a friend.
- If you're seated too far away, too close or where it's difficult to make eye contact with everyone on an interview panel, move your chair.

Voice

Pay attention to the effect other people's voices have on you. What is it about the tone, speed and pitch of someone's voice that is or isn't appealing? Notice the characteristics you attribute to people based on their voices.

Unless you have a disability or an injury or illness that affects your vocal cords or your breath, you have the power to change the way you use your voice. Go online or visit a public library to find resources that will help you learn how to develop your voice. Ask for feedback from friends, family members or a mentor about how you sound.

RESOURCE

Dealing with barriers

For additional strategies to overcome specific potential barriers to being hired, see the ALIS Tips *Finding Work With a Criminal Record, Overqualified? Make the Best of Your Experience!* and *Disclosure: What to Say About Your Disability – and When*, available at **alis.alberta.ca/tips.**

Anticipating employers' concerns

The *Alberta Human Rights Act* protects workers against discrimination on grounds such as age, race, religion and family status. However, other types of circumstances could be barriers to being hired. For example, you might anticipate that employers will be concerned if you

- have a criminal record
- have had an attendance problem
- lost your last job
- are overqualified
- don't speak or understand English well

What can you do to remove potential barriers? Employers want to hire people who are positive, enthusiastic and flexible. Projecting a positive attitude can help you break through preconceptions an employer may have.

If you lost your last job as a result of something you did, you may want to explain the circumstances, take responsibility and describe what you have learned from the experience. If you know that you need to brush up your skills in a particular area and you are planning to take a class or training, mention it during the interview to show that you are proactively looking to improve.

Knowing what to expect

Knowing in advance what to expect in an interview will go a long way toward reducing your anxiety. Use the information and suggestions in this section to help you

- understand different types of interviews
- understand the interview process
- answer typical interview questions
- know your human rights
- ask appropriate questions of your own during the interview

Typical interview types

The type and number of interviews you'll take part in depends on the size, scope and culture of the employer and on the position you apply for. Many employers will screen you on the basis of your cover letter and resumé and conduct one interview. Others may ask you to a series of interviews where you may meet with several different individuals or groups three or more times.

Screening interviews

The screening process starts with your resumé and cover letter. If you have shown you meet the criteria for the job, you typically move on to a screening interview of some kind, usually conducted by human resources staff. You may be screened by phone or in a face-to-face interview. You may also be screened

- by writing a proficiency test, such as a skills assessment
- by taking part in a group interview, where several applicants are interviewed at the same time. Each person answers a question or stands up and makes a short statement about himself or herself.
- by computer. You log on to the organization's website to answer a series of multiple-choice and short-answer questions when you submit your application or resumé online. Some organizations use this technique to screen out applicants. In this case, the organization will accept resumés or applications only from those who meet the computer software's screening criteria.

TIP

Questions to ask before the interview

When you're contacted for an interview, try to find out as much information as possible from the person who contacts you. If that person is unable to answer your questions, ask for someone who can, such as a human resources supervisor or the hiring manager. You need to find out

- the time of the interview
- the exact location of the interview: room number, floor, building and address
- directions, if you need them
- where and how long to park
- what type of interview to expect
- names and positions of all the interviewers
- what tests or exercises, if any, you may be expected to complete and how to prepare for them
- what you should bring

You can also use the opportunity to ask about the organization's dress code and to let the employer know if you're planning to bring your portfolio to the interview.

Panel interviews

Panel interviews are conducted by a group of representatives from an organization. For example, interviews may be conducted by a combination of people from human resources and the area in which the successful candidate will work. In the not-for-profit sector, entire boards sometimes participate in the hiring process.

At the beginning of a panel interview, be sure you're seated where you can make eye contact with all panel members. If you know the names and positions of the interviewers ahead of time, you may be able to identify whom you would be reporting to and whom you would be working with if you are the successful candidate. It's difficult to catch everyone's name as you're introduced to a group of people. If you make the effort to find out their names beforehand and write them down, you're more likely to feel comfortable using the panel members' names during the interview.

Serial interviews

Serial interviews are common in larger organizations. If you succeed at one level, you're then referred to another individual or panel for the next stage. You might have several separate interviews. Some of these may take place in informal settings such as restaurants. Some might involve a tour of a physical plant, for example, where you will be introduced to other staff. You'll be assessed throughout the process to determine how well you might fit in.

Phone and video interviews

Employers sometimes conduct phone, video or conference call interviews of applicants who live in other locations. Some employers ask job seekers to respond to a list of questions on video before inviting them for a second interview in person.

RESOURCE

Handling phone interviews

For more information on phone interviews, see the ALIS Tip *Telephone Interviews*, available at **alis.alberta.ca/tips.**

TIP

Giving a good interview

- Stay positive. If you must refer to a negative situation from your past, such as a problem with a supervisor or an organization, describe the situation factually and in a positive way. You may also choose to describe how you'd handle the situation differently the next time. Never say anything negative about a person or an organization.
- Stay calm. Be friendly and professional to everyone, including the person who greets you when you arrive.
- Focus on your strengths. Make it easy for employers to see how your qualifications meet their needs.
- Be honest but diplomatic.
- Avoid bringing up personal issues and discussing controversial or sensitive topics.
- Take your time responding to questions. Take a breath and think about your answer. If you don't understand a question, ask the interviewer to reframe it.
- Send the employer a thank-you note that emphasizes two or three reasons why you're a great candidate for the position, regardless of the outcome of the interview.
- Assess and learn from your performance.

The interview process

Well-planned interviews are usually conducted in the following sequence:

- Interviews generally start with introductions, handshakes and some polite conversation to put everyone at ease. Interviewers judge your confidence level by how you meet and greet new people and handle new situations.
- If you're being interviewed by more than one person and you haven't been introduced to everyone present, ask politely for their names and their positions.
- Usually the interviewer will give you an idea of what will happen in the interview and how long it will be. The interviewer's role is to ask questions that will draw out as much information from you as possible. You should expect to do 80 per cent of the talking.
- The interviewer will probably begin with general questions about your background and progress to more specific questions about your skills and experience.
- After the interviewer has asked his or her questions, you'll probably have an opportunity to ask any questions you may have about the job and organization. It's a good idea to take advantage of this opportunity. (See the **Asking your own questions** section on page 80.)
- To signal that the interview is nearly over, the interviewer might say, "Is there anything else you'd like to tell us?" At this point, you may want to briefly summarize three or four key points to remind interviewers about the skills and knowledge you can bring to the position.
- The interviewer may ask you for your references. Have a copy of your references list ready to provide.
- The interviewer will likely close the interview with a cordial statement such as, "We appreciate your interest in the job (or organization) and thank you for coming to an interview. You can expect to hear from us by next Tuesday." If the interviewer doesn't offer this kind of information about the next step, ask when you might expect to hear about the hiring decision. Then thank the interviewer for the opportunity and shake hands again, if it's appropriate, before you leave.

TIP

Taking initiative in an interview

Not all employers are good interviewers. If you encounter an employer who isn't, you may have to gently guide the conversation to make sure the employer realizes how your qualifications relate to the job requirements.

Other recruitment requirements

Before or after an interview, you may be asked to complete other recruitment requirements such as

- submitting samples of your work
- presenting your driver's licence, submitting an abstract of your driving record or providing evidence of academic qualifications, professional memberships or licences
- demonstrating job-related skills (for example, writing something based on supplied information)
- taking a test to evaluate your aptitude or technical expertise
- demonstrating your problem-solving skills by dealing with a hypothetical situation
- undergoing psychological or personality testing

Any tests you're asked to take should be relevant to the job and administered to all applicants. Find out as much as possible about any tests and ask if it's possible to prepare for them.

Typical interview questions

You can likely anticipate the majority of questions you'll be asked. For example, you'll probably be asked questions about your

- education, training, previous employment and volunteer or community activities
- career plans and how the position relates to them
- interest in the job and company
- strengths and weaknesses
- knowledge, skills and abilities
- expectations of your supervisor and the organization
- supervisory or management styles, if the job requires you to perform this function
- flexibility and adaptability
- availability to start work
- reasons for leaving previous employers
- reasons for pursuing particular goals, training or leisure activities
- salary expectations. If you don't know the salary range for the type of work you're applying for, check out the Wages and Salaries tab at **alis.alberta.ca/occinfo**. Or, if you're being interviewed by a large organization, check with the human resources department.

TIP

Anticipate and practise

The best way to prepare for an interview is to anticipate what you'll be asked and to develop and practise your responses:

- Write them down so that you can see your answers on paper.
- Record them so that you can listen to or watch yourself and gauge how much you're improving.
- Role-play with a friend or family member so that you can get feedback.

Each of these techniques will help you assess your responses objectively and decide how you could improve. The time you spend practising will improve your interview skills and build your confidence—a great way to reduce your nervousness during the interview.

Tough questions

If you've identified your skills and accomplishments using the exercises in the **Preparing for Your Work Search** section (starting on page 6), you have the information you need to answer the following tough interview questions:

- Why should we hire you?
- What would you bring to this job?
- Why do you want this job?
- Why do you want to leave your current job?
- Why did you leave your last job?
- What are your strengths?
- What are your weaknesses?
- What did you like about your last job?
- What did you dislike?
- Tell us about a time when you didn't handle a situation well and what you learned from it.

Candidly answering questions about strengths and weaknesses may seem to go against the idea of marketing yourself. But weakness in this context means a job-related knowledge or skill deficiency: you're being asked to acknowledge that there are areas you need to develop.

One way to answer these questions is to identify a weakness that wouldn't be a problem in the position or to explain how you're working on or have improved your performance in a particular area. For example, if you're being interviewed for a supervisory position but have limited supervisory experience, don't say, "I've never supervised anyone." Instead, say something like "Although I have limited supervisory experience, I am enrolled in a supervisory development program and have had some leadership experience with a community organization."

Tell me about yourself

Interviewers consistently report that one of the toughest questions for most job seekers to answer well is "Tell me about yourself." Your response to this common interview question reveals a lot about

- how well you deal with ambiguity
- your organizational and communication skills
- your ability to anticipate what the interviewer needs to know about you
- your ability to evaluate and summarize the most significant contributions you could make to the organization

Resist the impulse to ask "What do you want to know?" in reply. Instead, respond as if the interviewer had asked, "How would you describe your background and how it has prepared you for this job?" That's really the question being asked.

Use your response to stimulate the interviewer's interest in you. Avoid making general statements about your background and assuming that experience equals demonstrated competence. Talk about the results you've achieved.

- **Don't say**, "Well, I have seven years of experience in accounting for oilfield supply companies, including supervising four clerical support staff for three years. My academic background includes a Business Administration diploma in accounting from Anytown College and I've completed the fourth level of CGA certification." Avoid repeating the information in your resumé.
- **Do say**, "I've always been attracted to working with numbers and financial analysis. I started my post-secondary education by completing a Business Administration diploma at Anytown College, majoring in accounting. After I graduated, I applied to XYZ Oil Services and was chosen from a pool of 48 applicants for the position of office manager. In the seven years I've been there, I've been given more responsibility and three promotions. I feel I've contributed significantly to the company's profitability. I've recently completed the fourth level CGA and will write the final in May."

In the second response, the candidate offers relevant information about interests, motivation, ability to set goals and follow through, academic and job-related accomplishments, initiative, creativity, suitability for advancement and willingness to take on new challenges.

Hypothetical and behavioural questions

Some interview questions are difficult to anticipate or prepare for. For example, an interviewer might ask how you'd handle a particular type of stressful situation (a hypothetical question) or ask you to describe how you handled a difficult experience at work (a behavioural question). Your response reveals information about what kind of situations you find stressful and how you cope with them.

Employers ask hypothetical and behavioural questions to find out how you'd handle conditions you're likely to encounter on the job. For example, if the work sometimes requires dealing with disgruntled customers who may become verbally abusive, the employer needs to know how you'd react. The interviewer may ask what you would do in that situation or ask you to describe a situation in your last job that involved an angry customer. He or she may follow up with specific questions about how you handled the situation and what happened as a result of your actions.

The following suggestions may help you answer hypothetical and behavioural questions:

- Before an interview, analyze the information you've gathered about the employer and the work. Try to anticipate situations you might encounter on the job. Think about how you've handled similar situations in the past. Select situations in which your behaviour contributed to a positive outcome. Use the STARS storytelling method to develop brief descriptions of those situations. (See the **Analyzing your accomplishments—STARS** exercise on page 15 and the **Using STARS in an Interview** example on the next page for more details.)
- If you're caught off guard by a hypothetical question in an interview, think through your answer before you say anything. In order to be fair to all candidates, effective interviewers won't give you any clues as to what they think the right answer is. All you can do is answer honestly.
- When asked to describe situations you've actually experienced, limit your examples to those situations you handled well. Interviewers who ask behavioural questions believe that how you reacted in the past is a good indication of how you'll react in the future. They may disregard anything you say about how you'd handle the situation differently next time.
- Don't make up an answer to a behavioural question. The interviewer could follow up by asking detailed questions about the situation, what you did and what happened as a result. Always be honest. If you don't have work-related experience, describe a situation from a volunteer or community experience. If you have no experience relevant to the situation, describe how you would handle the situation.

Common behavioural questions

To practise answering behavioural questions, consider how you'd respond to the following prompts and questions:

- Please give us an example of a work situation where you had to deal with conflict, either with a customer or a co-worker. Tell us how you handled it.
- Describe a situation where a fellow worker or supervisor had expectations that you felt were unfair or unrealistic. How did you deal with that?
- Can you identify a work-related situation where you recognized a problem and initiated some action to correct the problem?
- Give us an example of some research you've done. What were your findings and conclusions? What did you decide or recommend as a result of your research?
- Give us an example of a time when you conformed to a policy that you didn't agree with. What was your rationale?
- Can you describe a group situation where you were the only person with an opposing viewpoint? How did you handle it? What were the results?

If success on the job requires handling stressful situations calmly and effectively, an interviewer may actually try to provoke you to see how well you handle the situation. You have nothing to gain and everything to lose by getting angry or letting your disappointment show if you think the interview is not going well. No matter what happens in an interview, remain calm, composed and confident—or at least try to look like you are.

Inappropriate questions

Employers who are not well informed about human rights protection in Alberta under the *Alberta Human Rights Act* may ask inappropriate questions in an interview.

It's **acceptable** for potential employers to ask

- about your ability to fulfil work-related requirements, such as your ability to work night shifts, travel or lift heavy items
- for any previous names you've held if the information is needed to complete reference checks or verify your past employment or education
- for your previous address if, for example, the job has a residency requirement
- whether you're legally permitted to work in Alberta

It's **unacceptable** for employers to ask for any information that could intentionally or inadvertently be used to discriminate against you, including information about gender, marital status, age, birthplace, ancestry or religious beliefs. For more information, check out the ALIS Tip *Human Rights and You: What Can Employers Ask?* at **alis.alberta.ca/tips**.

Asking your own questions

Toward the end of an interview, employers often ask if you have any questions about the organization or the job. If you say "no," which is what many applicants do, you may be sending the employer a negative message.

By having questions prepared, you show the employer that you

- did your research
- are very interested in the company
- know what's important to you in an employer/employee relationship
- are confident and able to assert yourself appropriately

Preface your questions by saying that the interview has provided you with valuable information and you'd like to ask some questions to clarify your understanding.

EXAMPLE

Using STARS in an interview

The following example shows how a candidate used STARS to answer the behavioural prompt "Tell us how you've handled a problem with a customer."

Situation: A disgruntled customer claimed the shipping department sent his shop the wrong parts.

Task: As the assistant manager, I had to determine if we had made an error or if the customer had placed an incorrect order. This was a high-volume customer whose business was important to my organization.

Action: I called the customer immediately to assure him that I would investigate the situation myself. I checked all the details: his documents and our documents, our stock-labelling system, the steps in the order-filling process. Sure enough, we'd made the mistake—a typo. But the root of the problem was in our parts-numbering system, where similar parts carried numbers that were too much alike and prone to this type of error.

Results: I called the customer to tell him the correct parts were being couriered to him overnight and that this order was on us. I assured him that we would make changes to ensure that the problem wouldn't happen again. Working with the warehouse and shipping managers, we implemented a new numbering system that has shortened our order response time by 15 per cent and reduced errors from an average of 11 to three per month.

Skills: I used my communication, analytical and teamwork skills to solve a particular problem for a customer and an overall problem for my organization.

Handling inappropriate questions

There are several ways to respond if you're asked an inappropriate question in an interview:

- Politely refuse to answer the question. Tactfully let the employer know that the question is inappropriate.
- Answer the question and go on to discuss the underlying concern. For example, an employer who inappropriately asks about your family plans or the number of children you have might incorrectly assume you're more likely to be absent because of parental leave or sick time. In this case, you could address the underlying concern by talking about your excellent attendance record and your ability to do the job. Bear in mind that interviewers may just be making polite conversation or may not be thinking about human rights legislation, so don't assume they're ignoring your rights.
- Respond only to the underlying concern.

However you choose to answer, be professional and diplomatic.

If you have a human rights complaint or a question about a specific situation, contact the Alberta Human Rights Commission at 780-427-7661 (Red Deer and north) or 403-297-6571 (south of Red Deer), or visit the website at **albertahumanrights.ab.ca**.

It's standard practice to bring a list of prepared questions with you or to jot down questions that occur to you during the interview. When it's your turn to ask questions, quickly review your list and ask any questions that haven't already been answered.

What should you ask?

In an interview, you may want to ask about

- the key focus in the department at this time
- the first major project or challenge in this position
- major challenges facing the company
- working conditions—for example, what employees say they enjoy most about working for the organization
- the number of people you'd be working with or supervising
- reporting relationships
- travel requirements, if any
- what the organization values and looks for in employees
- performance measures and reviews
- the organization's policies regarding continuing education and career development

Questions about salary, vacation, benefits and hours of work should be left until after you receive a job offer.

If you've researched the job so well you don't have any questions or you just can't think of any, you could say something like the following:

- "Well, I did have a few questions before I came in, but you've covered them all during the interview."
- "Between the research I did beforehand and the helpful information you've provided today, I think I have a pretty good sense of the company, the job and your expectations. And I'm even more convinced I'm the person for the job!" Or, "I'm even more convinced that my skills and experience are a great match for the position requirements!"

Learning from the process

Effective job seekers stay open to what they can learn from the interview process. They continually reflect on and evaluate the steps they take and the outcomes they experience. Learning from the process helps them to maintain both their perspective and their self-confidence.

Assessing interviews

Regardless of the outcome, do a self-evaluation following each interview. This will help you resist the urge to replay the event in your mind and second-guess yourself. It will also prepare you for the next interview.

Use the following suggestions to assess how you did:

- Write down as many questions as you can remember from the interview and how you answered them. If there were any questions you weren't prepared for, write down how you might answer similar questions next time.
- Make a note of any questions you wished you had asked and add them to your list for next time.

- Give yourself a pat on the back for the questions you handled well.
- Assess how well you emphasized the connection between what you have to offer and what the employer was looking for. What would you do differently next time?
- Assess your attitude throughout the interview. Did you keep your responses positive, polite and professional?

Remember that each interview offers you an opportunity to learn, improve your presentation and move toward the interview that lands you a job.

Following up

Following up with employers by phone or email can provide useful information about the current labour market, other applicants you're competing with, the employer's needs and your interview skills. To approach employers for feedback, use the following suggestions:

- If your approach is professional and non-confrontational, employers may be willing to provide feedback about your interview performance. Be sure to phrase your request so that employers understand that you're not asking them to defend their decisions.
- Ask employers if they'd be willing to comment on your interview performance—both what you did effectively and what you could improve.
- Listen carefully to their answers and remain objective. What you learn could greatly improve your chances of success next time. If you don't agree, don't argue—you're still being evaluated and you want to leave a favourable impression.
- Graciously thank employers for their feedback and, if appropriate, reassert your interest in employment with the organization.
- Keep employers' names and contact information. You may be applying to them in the future. Meanwhile, they may be good contacts for your network.
- Ask employers if you could contact them again in a few months. Sometimes the successful candidate doesn't work out and the employer needs to hire again.

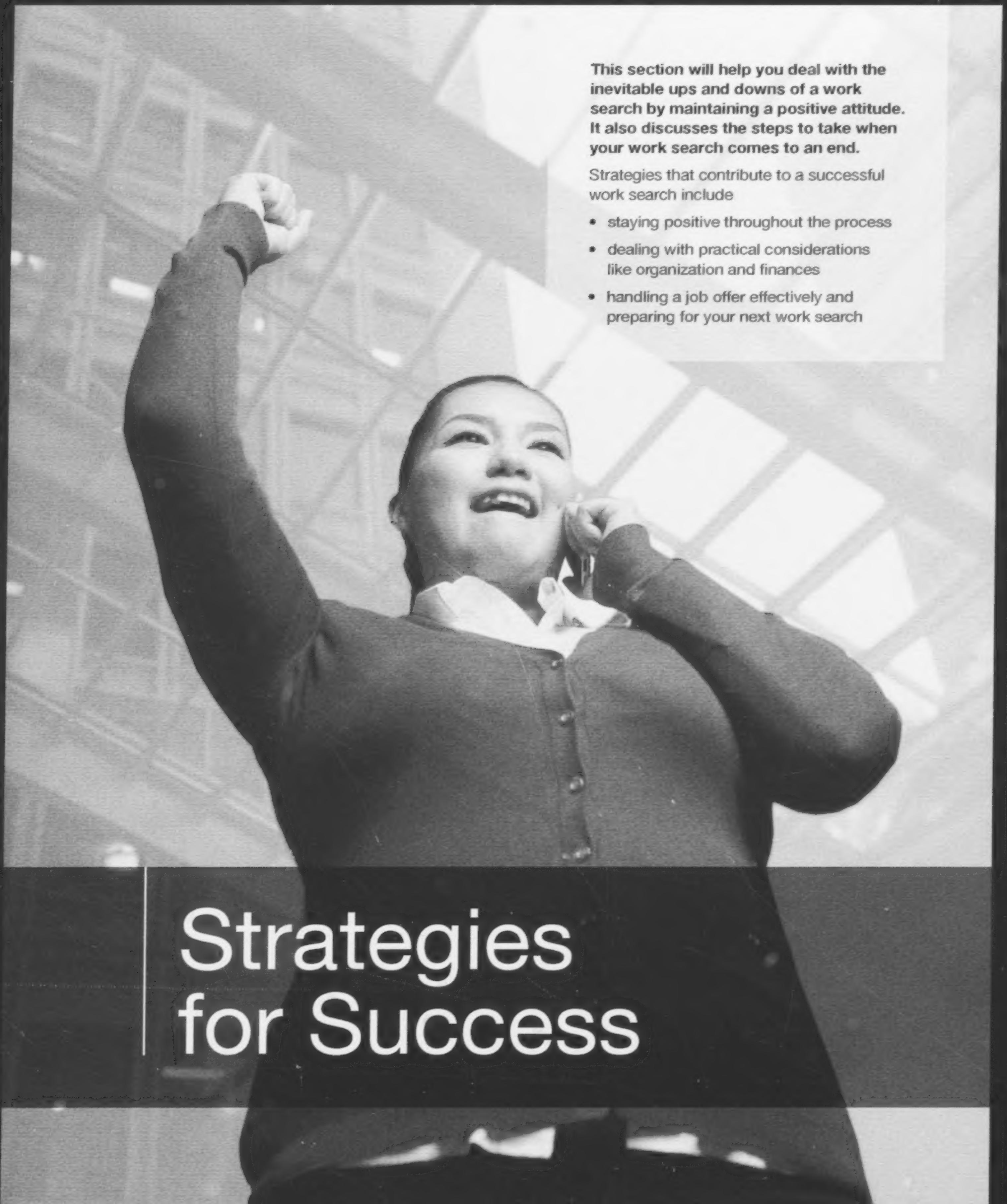
Employers usually find it difficult to select one person from among several well-qualified applicants. Often, they make their decision based on gut feelings or intuition about how the successful candidate will fit in and meet the organization's needs. That's why it's so important not to take the rejection you experience in your work search personally. Learn what you can from it and move on.

When you don't get the job

Many factors can contribute to an employer choosing a candidate other than you:

- Sometimes employers wish they could hire more than one candidate, but they have only one opening.
- Another candidate may have more experience or lower salary expectations.
- Some employers take office dynamics into consideration and choose the candidate who will fit in best with the existing staff.
- The successful candidate may have a history or connection with the employer.

Choosing the successful candidate is a business decision. Don't take it personally!



This section will help you deal with the inevitable ups and downs of a work search by maintaining a positive attitude. It also discusses the steps to take when your work search comes to an end.

Strategies that contribute to a successful work search include

- staying positive throughout the process
- dealing with practical considerations like organization and finances
- handling a job offer effectively and preparing for your next work search

Strategies for Success

Thinking positively

When you're unemployed or unhappy in your current position, worried about money, anxious about how your qualifications measure up and afraid of rejection, you may sometimes find yourself struggling to maintain a positive attitude.

Self-confidence is a vital element in your work search—employers want to hire people who believe in themselves. Yet nothing destroys self-confidence faster than a descent into negativity, worry and fear.

This section looks at strategies for maintaining the positive attitude that will support your self-confidence. These suggestions will help you

- avoid self-defeating thoughts
- deal with job loss or the transition from school to work
- handle rejection
- maintain your energy
- cope with emotional highs and lows

Avoiding self-defeating thoughts

What you think about yourself affects your expectations and behaviour. If you think you can't succeed (for example, "No one will hire me because I was fired" or "I'm too old, too young, not educated enough..."), you'll feel defeated by your negative thoughts before you even begin your work search and may act in ways that are likely to create negative results.

If any of the following thoughts seem familiar, consider the responses carefully.

- **I'll take any job I can get**. You're probably selling yourself short. You're a unique individual with many skills and interests. There are many things you can do. Which interests will lead to the most productive use of your skills and abilities? What type of work will satisfy you?

  If you don't know what kind of work you're looking for, you risk taking jobs you don't like or aren't well suited for. Targeting your work search is much more effective than widely distributing hundreds of resumés that aren't relevant to the employer or the position. If you're not sure what kind of work you want, take some time to review and complete the **Your ideal workplace** exercise on page 18.

- **I'm only qualified for one type of work**. If you think you're only qualified to work at what you're trained for or have done in the past, you may be limiting your options unnecessarily.

  Stop thinking in terms of job titles and start thinking about your skills. For example, teachers have communication skills, organizational skills and leadership skills. Hairstylists must be skilled at making customers feel comfortable, marketing products, dealing with cash and working efficiently. These skills are required in many types of work, not just teaching and hairstyling.

  To find out what skills you have that could transfer to other kinds of work, check out the **Identifying your skills** section on page 5.

- **I have no idea what I want**. Try making a list of things you don't want to do. Then take each item on the list and rewrite it to state what you do want. For example, if you don't want to work shifts, say "I want to work regular weekday hours" or whatever is appropriate in your circumstances. See the **Understanding your workplace preferences** section on page 17.

- **There ought to be a test I can take that will tell me what I should do!** Most of us would like to find an easy way to bypass the self-assessment part of the work search. Unfortunately, self-assessment is not always that simple. Career and employment counsellors can help you explore possibilities. Career planning workshops, along with tools like those available on CAREERinsite (**careerinsite.alberta.ca**), will help you understand yourself better. Ultimately, however, only you can decide what type of work will be interesting and meaningful for you, pay well enough and satisfy your other requirements (hours, location, benefits and organizational culture).

Dealing with job loss

If you've been laid off or fired, you may have to deal with a range of emotions before you're ready to begin a serious work search. Some people experience all of the following stages of job loss within hours, while others need more time to work through particular stages:

- **Denial**. At first, you may be in shock and act as though nothing has happened, particularly if you didn't expect to lose your job.
- **Anger**. You may blame yourself, your employer or someone else.
- **Bargaining**. You may try to reverse the situation by offering to take a pay cut or move to another position in the organization.
- **Depression**. You may grieve your job loss and lose your sense of perspective. Reach out and let your family and friends help you through this stage. Other people directly affected by your job loss may also be grieving and may need to talk about their fears too.
- **Acceptance**. You accept the fact that the job is gone and start gearing up for the work search ahead.

RESOURCE

Job loss: Practical steps

For specific suggestions on dealing with job loss, see the series of ALIS Tips *Job Loss 1: First Things First, Job Loss 2: Coping With Change and Job Loss 3: Moving On*, available at **alis.alberta.ca/tips**. Another helpful resource is *Creating a New Future: The Job-Loss Workbook*, available at **alis.alberta.ca/publications**.

Transitioning from school to work

Although many students work part time while they're going to school, the transition to the full-time work world can be stressful. If you're a recent graduate accustomed to the relatively structured school environment, you may feel overwhelmed while you figure out what to do next. As you start out in your career, you may also feel like you face a frustrating catch-22: you need experience to get a job, but you need a job to get experience.

Start thinking about your work search before you leave school, and keep the following in mind:

- **Be open to different options**. These days, most people change occupations several times throughout their lives, so don't worry about finding the perfect fit on the first try. Give yourself permission to explore.
- **Be realistic**. You may need to compromise on some of your workplace wants in order to get a foot in the door and gain professional experience. An entry-level position won't have the salary or responsibilities that you can hope to have a few years down the road. Your career is a journey, and you have to start somewhere.
- **Recognize your advantages**. Many employers prefer to hire recent graduates because they have up-to-date knowledge in their field and tend to adapt well to the employer's corporate culture.

Handling rejection

It's not uncommon to experience rejection at some point in the job search process. Try to pursue multiple opportunities at once rather than focusing all your energy and hopes on one application. That way, if one option doesn't work out, you'll already have others on the go.

If you do experience rejection, don't let it erode your confidence. Instead, use it to your advantage and take positive, appropriate action to learn from the experience. Analyze your work search tools and strategies and look for ways to improve.

For example, rework your resumé or move your networking activities into high gear. If you're not sure how you can improve, gather feedback by

- asking former colleagues, mentors, friends and family for feedback about your marketing tools and strategies
- talking to a career and employment counsellor at an Alberta Works Centre or to a Career Information Hotline advisor (See the **Resources** section on page 95 for contact information.)
- following up with employers

Coping with emotional highs and lows

Whatever your circumstances, you'll likely experience emotional highs and lows as you progress through your work search. It's important to have realistic expectations. Prepare yourself emotionally and financially for a work search that could take six months or longer. You may find work sooner than that, but keeping your expectations reasonable will help you keep your emotions stable.

One of the best ways to cope with emotional highs and lows is to talk about your feelings. Don't shut out the people who care about you. Acknowledge and talk about your deepest emotions with people you trust. Keep a private journal and use it to write out your fears and frustrations.

If you reach the point where you feel you can't cope, talk to a professional counsellor. Reach out to organizations such as the Canadian Mental Health Association (Alberta Division) at **alberta.cmha.ca** to find the services you need.

Maintaining your energy

Looking for work is hard work. It can take a lot of energy—mentally, emotionally and physically. Many people say it's one of the toughest things they've ever had to do. To maintain your positive attitude and renew your hope, remember to stop and smell the roses from time to time. Ask for support from friends and family members.

Be good to yourself. Reward yourself when you've worked hard. Do things that help to reduce your stress and increase your energy. There are plenty of inexpensive ways to reward yourself and maintain your momentum. Here are only a few of the possibilities:

- run, jog, lift weights or work out
- walk the dog
- go for a bike ride
- read a book, cover to cover
- watch a favourite movie
- do a crossword puzzle
- listen to your favourite music
- walk in a park
- visit a museum
- spend time with friends and family
- attend a free concert
- organize a pick-up game of hockey
- draw
- build something
- skate
- read comics or graphic novels
- dance
- do some gardening
- take a long bubble bath surrounded by candlelight and music

RESOURCE

More help with staying positive

If you're feeling discouraged about your work search, see the ALIS Tip *Stay Positive during Your Work Search*, available at **alis.alberta.ca/tips**, or check out these resources:

- *Change and Transitions: The Path From A to B*
- *Positive Works II*

These publications are available at **alis.alberta.ca/publications**.

Dealing with practical considerations

Set yourself up for success. If you're unemployed, spend as much time each day on your work search (networking, researching, contacting employers, preparing your marketing tools and planning your strategies) as you would at work.

The harder and smarter you work at finding work, the sooner you'll succeed and the happier you'll be with what you find. Include people in your work search process who will help you to keep progressing.

Work as efficiently and effectively as you can by

- getting and staying organized
- being financially responsible

Staying organized

Whether you prefer to keep your records electronically or in hard copy, being organized will help you feel more confident and professional. Most importantly, all the information you need to succeed in your work search will be at your fingertips.

Keep electronic or scanned work search documents in a folder on your computer or on a flash drive or disc. If you have paper copies, keep them in a set of file folders, an expanding file or a three-ring binder. Arrange the information in the following sections:

- information about you, your skills and accomplishments (Use the self-assessment exercises in this publication.)
- information about your market, such as news articles about organizations that interest you, magazine articles about employment trends, notes you jot down when you get an idea and job postings
- employer contact information and related notes, including names, phone numbers, dates contacted, outcomes and when to call back
- your marketing tools, all versions of your resumé and cover letters, and thank-you letters or cards

Organize a system to record your actions and monitor your progress. For example, you can use the *Work Search Plan and Record*, available at **alis.alberta.ca/wsrecord**.

Being financially responsible

If you're currently unemployed or soon will be, there are at least three reasons for dealing with any concerns you may have about money now:

1. Worrying about money drains energy you need for your work search.
2. If employers get the impression that you want to work for them only because you need the money, they probably won't hire you.
3. If you're worried about money, you're more likely to accept work you don't really want. If you don't like the work, you'll be looking for work again much sooner than you would otherwise.

Plan ahead so that you aren't caught off guard by work search expenses. You'll need appropriate clothing and shoes, stationery supplies and funds for things such as transportation and postage.

Your work search could take months. Use the following suggestions to prepare for the unexpected:

- Take stock of all possible sources of income: severance pay, pension fund refunds, employment insurance (EI) and so on.

RESOURCE

More advice on managing money

You'll find help with the budgeting process and cutting your expenses, as well as other information, in the publication *Stretch Your Dollars: Budgeting Basics*, available at **alis.alberta.ca/publications**.

- If you're eligible, apply for EI immediately and fill out the forms carefully. Your first cheque will take several weeks to arrive, and any problems with your forms will create a further delay.
- Consider ways to save or earn money over the short term. You could hold a garage sale, deliver newspapers or exchange services with friends and neighbours (for example, you babysit for others and they babysit for you).
- Keep track of your expenses and see if you can cut back anywhere. Look through your receipts and bank statements to figure out how much you're currently spending and on what.

If you owe money, discuss your situation with your bank manager or a financial counsellor. You may be able to consolidate your debts or negotiate smaller loan payments.

TAX+
TAX-
RATE
MU
MONTHLY EXPENSES

Handling a job offer

After all the time, effort and care you put into your work search, it can be tempting to leap at the first job you're offered without negotiating salary, benefits and other terms of employment.

With the exception of some entry-level positions and jobs where you're automatically placed on a grid determined by education and experience, many employers expect you to make a counter-offer and negotiate terms.

To effectively negotiate a job offer, you need to

- understand the offer
- evaluate the offer
- make a counter-offer

Once you do accept a job offer, you'll also want to consider how best to

- wrap up your current work search
- prepare for your next work search

Understanding the offer

To understand an offer, you need to see it in writing. If the employer doesn't provide a written version of the offer, ask for one. Or take careful notes on the offer when it's made to you verbally, then describe it in detail in a letter or email to the employer and ask for confirmation.

Once you have the offer in writing, check it over to make sure you understand the terms, including

- the employer's expectations (including hours of work, shift work, overtime, travel, using your own vehicle or other equipment)
- salary and other benefits (including vacation, health and dental benefits)
- any other conditions or terms (including probationary periods, perks, employee wellness programs)

If any details are unclear, discuss them with the employer. Once you understand what you're being offered, the next step is to assess the offer in context.

Evaluating the offer

To decide how to respond to the offer, you need to look at it in context. What are typical salaries, working conditions, terms and benefits in your industry and in your location? How does this offer compare? To get a feel for what's standard for a similar position in your area, check out the following sources:

- Visit **alis.alberta.ca/occinfo** for information on more than 550 occupations, including duties, working conditions, and wage and salary ranges within different industry groups.
- Talk to your network, especially people who work in the same or a similar occupational area.
- Visit job search and recruiting agency websites or look at career ads in newspapers and other publications to check out salaries and other terms offered for comparable positions.
- Ask your professional association, if applicable.

Next, analyze how you feel about the offer. Are you genuinely interested in the position or are you motivated by other concerns, such as conditions in your current job or the length of time you've been unemployed? What other opportunities are you considering and how strong are your prospects? Talk over the offer with your immediate family, trusted friends, a mentor or a professional advisor.

Finally, look at the offer from the employer's point of view. How quickly does the company want to fill the position? How strong are your qualifications? Who else could they offer the position to?

If you feel that it's acceptable, agree to the offer. If, however, you feel that you need or can legitimately ask for more, be prepared to make a counter-offer.

Making a counter-offer

Negotiating the terms of a job offer can be a delicate process. Here are some suggestions on making a counter-offer:

- Decide what you want and what you'll accept. Think about how and where you can compromise.
- Know why you're worth the additional salary, benefits or perks you're asking for. Know what's standard for your industry and area. Be prepared to demonstrate the strength of your qualifications.
- Write out and practise the terms of your counter-offer. Practise statements like "This position looks exciting, and I have great respect for the organization. I believe I have exactly the kinds of skills and strengths you're looking for. However, the salary offer is less than what I expected. I was thinking more in the range between [indicate the salary range you want]."
- Ask if there's any flexibility in the offer. Suggest some possible compromises. For example, if the position requires more travel than you prefer, would the employer be open to balancing this requirement with letting you work from home on a regular basis? If salary isn't negotiable, would the employer consider increasing the amount of holiday time available or other perks?
- Be polite and professional. Approach the negotiation from a win-win perspective.

If you reach a verbal agreement with the employer, ask for confirmation in writing.

If you decide not to accept the offer or the response to your counter-offer, let the employer know, then follow up with a letter thanking the employer for the offer. This keeps your options open for the future.

Wrapping up your work search

An interview and then a job offer—this is the final result of an effective work search, one that every job seeker looks forward to. After reading the information and completing the exercises in this publication, you know how much time and effort it takes to get this far. When you have accepted a job offer, take the following steps:

- Send your current employer a letter of resignation giving at least two weeks' notice (or whatever is required by your contract). Be tactful, ask for a letter of recommendation and don't burn any bridges!
- Let your network and your references know your work search has been successful. Thank them again for their help.
- Withdraw any other applications or proposals you may have made to other employers and let them know that you've accepted an offer.

Preparing for your next work search

Your current transition is probably not your last; chances are you'll change jobs several times over the course of your career.

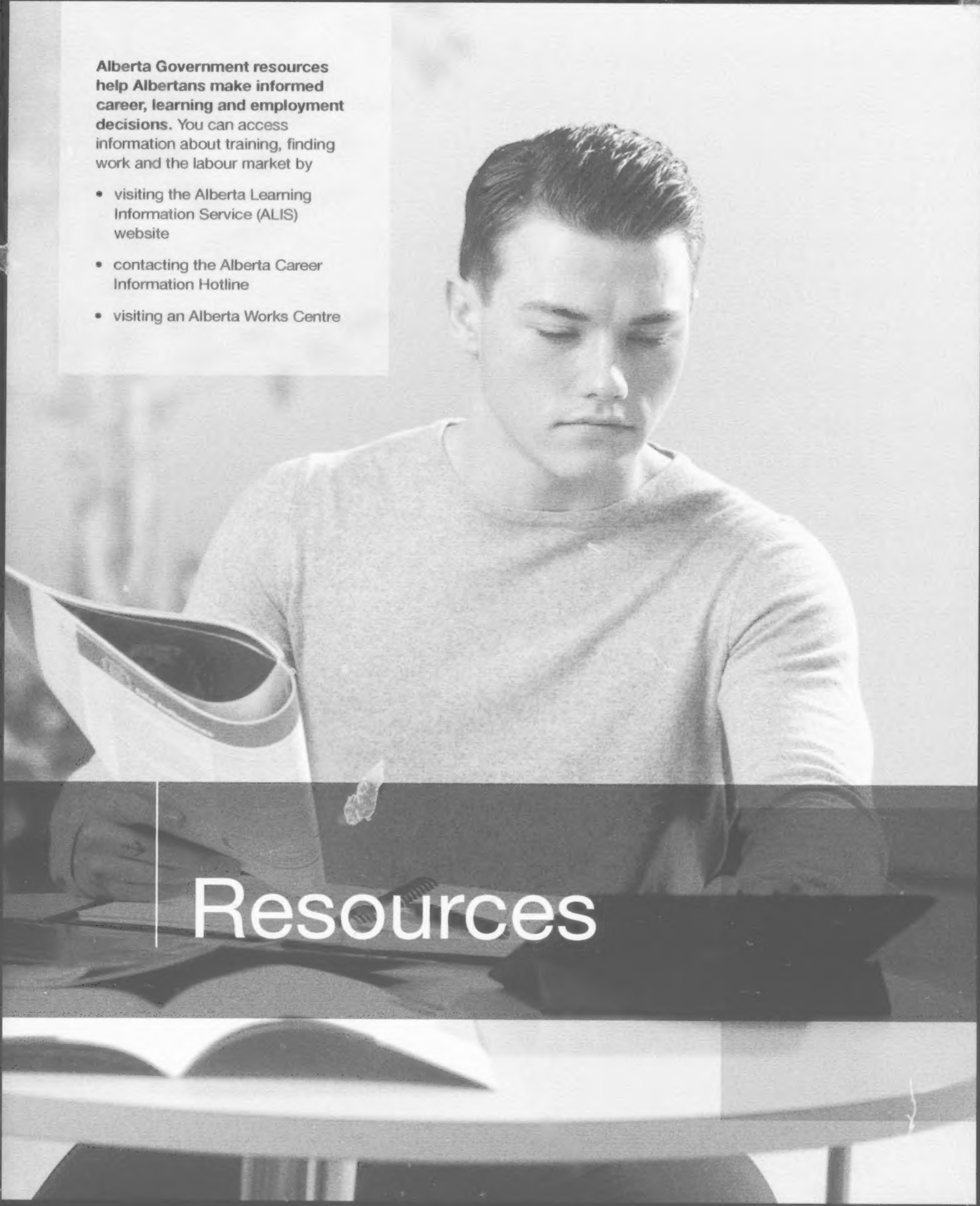
Ironic as it sounds, the day you're hired is a good time to start preparing for your next work transition. Why? From day one at your new job, you'll be learning skills, gaining experience and meeting new people. You'll be developing yourself and expanding your opportunities. If you begin now to identify and nurture these opportunities and keep track of these changes, you'll be well prepared when you make your next transition.

Use the following suggestions to get started:

- Keep your resumé master up to date with new information on your work experience, education and accomplishments.
- Maintain (or create) your portfolio.
- Stay in touch with the people who've helped and supported you.
- Build relationships with people who will mentor you.
- Take advantage of opportunities to develop and grow. For example, take part in professional development activities or volunteer for special assignments.
- Stay current with changes in your field.
- Become a valuable asset to your employer and your co-workers.
- Keep networking. Now that you've found work, become a resource for others who are currently looking for a job. Offer advice, information, referrals or support.

Alberta Government resources help Albertans make informed career, learning and employment decisions. You can access information about training, finding work and the labour market by

- visiting the Alberta Learning Information Service (ALIS) website
- contacting the Alberta Career Information Hotline
- visiting an Alberta Works Centre



Resources

Alberta Learning Information Service (ALIS) website

alis.alberta.ca

ALIS is Alberta's leading online source for career, learning and employment services and information. Here you'll find the resources you need for making the most of your future.

Learn the answers to work search questions and information on every stage of your work search, including

- looking for work
- networking
- researching employers
- developing your resumé
- completing online job applications
- preparing for the interview process

CAREERinsite is your guide to career planning. Explore career options based on your values, skills, abilities and interests. Everything you need to plan your work and learning is here at **alis.alberta.ca/careerinsite**.

OCCinfo provides information on occupations and educational programs in schools in Alberta. Learn about Alberta's employment outlook and advancement, and find information about job duties and working conditions, educational and certification requirements, and wage and salary ranges. Visit **alis.alberta.ca/occinfo**.

Watch occupational videos featuring real people working in real jobs. Learn what knowledge and skills are required for different occupations by visiting **alis.alberta.ca/videos**.

Discover tips on career planning, education and jobs that can be searched by keyword or topic at **alis.alberta.ca/tips**.

Find a variety of career, education, and employment publications, available at **alis.alberta.ca/publications**.

Alberta Career Information Hotline

Call the hotline for answers to your questions about

- career planning
- occupations
- resumé review (including the e-Resumé Review service)
- labour market information
- work search skills
- the workplace

Phone: 1-800-661-3753 toll-free
780-422-4266 in Edmonton
Email: hotline@alis.gov.ab.ca
Website: **alis.alberta.ca/hotline**

Alberta Works Centres

Come in to one of the Alberta Works Centres located throughout the province to find information on occupations, career options, work search and education programs and funding. These centres have computers for Internet use and word processing, as well as phones and fax machines available to help you with your work search. You can also talk to a career and employment consultant. To locate an Alberta Works Centre near you, call the Career Information Hotline or visit the ALIS website at **alis.alberta.ca/awc**.

Alberta Job Banks

Opportunities for work exist in all kinds of industries, regions and professions. There are helpful links to the following job bank groupings:

- Alberta and regional job banks
- public service employer and industry job banks
- student job banks

To access these job banks, visit **alis.alberta.ca/jobs**.

Feedback

We'd like your comments...

Advanced Techniques for Work Search Date ____________________

Please indicate how much you agree with each of the following statements.

As a result of using this resource...

	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Doesn't Apply
I have a better understanding of					
how I can make a career change	○	○	○	○	○
how to look for work	○	○	○	○	○
resumés, cover letters or other job search tools	○	○	○	○	○
where to find job opportunities	○	○	○	○	○
employment interviews	○	○	○	○	○
what I can offer an employer	○	○	○	○	○
how to help my family members look for work	○	○	○	○	○
my interests, passions, skills or values	○	○	○	○	○
how I can adjust to change	○	○	○	○	○
I can help my clients or students better understand how to					
plan their careers	○	○	○	○	○
look for work	○	○	○	○	○

What other topics do you have a better understanding of as a result of using this resource?

What action were you able to take as a result of using this resource?

How can we improve this resource? What was not useful?

Please return this form to:

Workplace and Career Planning
Alberta Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour
12th Floor, 10030 - 107 Street, South Tower
Edmonton, AB T5J 3E4

Fax: 780-422-5319
Email: info@alis.gov.ab.ca

Thinking
About Your
Future?

alis.alberta.ca

CAREER PLANNING • EDUCATION • JOBS

Wondering where to take your career? How to find a job?
Is continuing your education the next step?
Find the answers on ALIS.

Make the Most of Your Future

Alberta
Government

Do you have some experience in the workplace, post-secondary education or a combination of both? Are you looking for a new job? If so, *Advanced Techniques for Work Search* is for you!

You'll learn how to identify your skills, update your resume, and apply your skills to find a job that's right for you.